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Hegel's Theory of Self-conscious Life

Guido Seddone

Hegel's Theory of Self-conscious Life

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By

Guido Seddone



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The task of proving and explaining in more detail
this innermost insight of speculation—that is infinity
as self-referring negativity,
this ultimate source of all activity, life,
and consciousness—belongs to logic
as purely speculative philosophy

G. W. F. HEGEL, *Philosophy of Right* § 7



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Acknowledgements

Hegel's thought represents a huge challenge for every philosopher because it fosters the power of abstraction and conceptualization and pushes the limits of language to attain an extensive understanding of human rationality, sociality and history. This book acquiesces in following the path indicated by Hegel and aims at enhancing our comprehension of the classical philosophical problems from the contemporary point of view. This is the reason why I am indebted to a large group of people for helping me in various ways to develop the ideas in the book and get them on paper. Firstly, I would like to mention the Research European Agency of the European Commission for financing this project under the *Marie Skłodowska-Curie* grant agreement No. 704127, HEGNAT. Many thanks go to the Department DUSIC of the University of Parma where the project HEGNAT has been hosted and carried out from 2016–2019 and where I am currently associate professor for theoretical philosophy. The support from the Director Prof. D. Saglia, the faculty members and the administrative staff has been of utmost importance for obtaining the serenity necessary to carry on this philosophical endeavor. Many thanks also to the Department of Philosophy, Georgetown University (Washington D.C.) for hosting me two years as a Visiting Fellow from 2016–2018. I express also my gratitude to the Department of Philosophy, UNSW (Sydney, AU) for the co-organization of the conference *Naturalism and Sociality* in February 2019.

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Concerning the literature quoted in this book, I would like to inform the reader about my choice to only use the English translation of the Hegel's works because my aim has been to address theoretical and systematic aspects of the Hegelian philosophy and to avoid any methodology recalling history of philosophy and its nuances. For me the central issue is relating Hegel's thought to contemporary issues and not to past ones. I decided to abbreviate the titles of these books, the reader will find the list of the abbreviations at the end of this volume under the heading *References and Abbreviations*.

Introduction

In the history of philosophical thought there have been moments in which thinkers have focused on the question about the knowledge of the human practices and their evaluation. In these phases their main interest has neglected the problem of the truth about nature and natural facts and has turned its gaze towards the historical, social and cultural conditions in which knowledge itself is possible. Upon careful analysis, this orientation towards the very author of the thought and of its conditions, i.e. the human being, proves to be much more fruitful and rich than the bare empiricist investigation which considers certainty as dependent on mere empirical data. It does not only discover that the human being is free in establishing practices and practices of knowledge, but also that the human existence itself is determined by the answer that we are able to elaborate about the true nature of the human being and of his practical universe. In the history of philosophy the Hegelian thought represents one of the most important moments of this type of research together with the Vedic thought, the Socratic and post Socratic philosophy, medieval thought and theology, the Renaissance and few contemporary philosophers including Nietzsche, Wittgenstein and Anscombe. Hegel was strongly animated by this research and it is no coincidence that the first paragraph of his book on the *Philosophy of the Mind* carries the quote from Delphi's oracle γνῶθι σεαυτὸν [*know thyself*] as the incipit of every philosophy of the human spirit.¹ In this kind of research there is a genuine philosophical approach that empiricist and strict analytical philosophies lack, namely the eagerness to improve human life and practices by investigating them and by disclosing their grounds. Hegel's commitment to this research is truly extensive from his logic to the philosophy of human history, from the philosophy of right to the question of social

¹ Hegel *PM*, § 377: "The knowledge of mind is the most concrete knowledge, and thus the highest and most difficult. *Know thyself*. The meaning of this absolute command—whether in itself or in the historical circumstances of its first pronouncement—is not only self-knowledge in respect of the particular capacities, character, propensities, and foibles of the individual. The knowledge it commands is knowledge of man's genuine reality, as well as of genuine reality in and for itself—of the very essence as mind. Equally, the philosophy of mind too does not have the meaning of so-called *understanding of human nature*, an understanding that likewise endeavours to explore the *particularities*, passions, and foibles of other men, those so-called recesses of the human heart. For one thing, understanding of this son makes sense only if we presuppose knowledge of the *universal*, man *as such* and thus essentially mind. And for another, it concerns itself with contingent, insignificant, and *untrue* existences of the mental, but does not penetrate to what is *substantial*, the mind itself."

recognition. How is methodologically possible to combine very far aspects of philosophy under the same kind of issue concerning the human being and how the human practices and institutions are set up? Hegel systematic solution to this problem carries the name of *analysis of the conceptual* [*Begriffsanalyse*], namely the formal analysis about the way how we think ourselves, our sociality and our practices (Stekeler-Weithofer 2005). This reflective thought represents the kernel of the self-conscious existence, which investigates the conceptual requisites for thinking the object in order to achieve higher degrees of autonomy and self-determination. Consequently, the formal analysis of the conceptual requires to be related to self-consciousness as a natural existence because the concept itself cannot be fully disclosed without a consideration about the subject bearing it. Hegel, therefore, combines the formal analysis of the idea to the more concrete and naturalistic investigation about the true nature of self-consciousness, what Kant disregarded since he accounted for the *I-think* as a mere transcendental condition of knowledge, rather than as a subject with an ontological status. We can state that Kant's failure was to partially overlook the imperative γνῶθι σεαυτόν [*know thyself*] because he only conceived of knowledge as the transcendental problem about the conditions of truth and avoided any attempt to investigate the true essence of the knowing subject. Following Hegel instead, the analysis of the conceptual cannot be exhaustive regardless of our understanding of the self-conscious subject bearing the concept. Self-consciousness is indeed the main feature of thinking because it is only through self-awareness that the concept can be explicitly articulated and explained as the right answer to the problem of both knowledge and self-knowledge. In this book we will highlight that self-conscious life shares with the other life-forms this self-referentiality with the only (crucial) distinction that in the former it is made explicit by means of the inferential articulation of the concepts (Brandom 2000). In other words, any formal analysis of the conceptual has to deal with the more naturalistic question of self-conscious life, and defining this kind of life means also defining the social, historical and cooperative nature of human civilization. This is the reason why Hegel makes recourse to the notion of the conceptual and, generally speaking, to the methodology of analysis of the conceptual also in the *Philosophy of Right* and in the *Philosophy of World Human History* that he considers as aspects of the self-conscious life and as ruled by the same dialectical logics.

This book strives to deal with Hegel's thought by means of a thoroughly, unitarian and logical approach and to enforce the idea that philosophy is rigorous as far as it is able to consistently tackle the question of self-consciousness and self-knowledge (Rödl 2018). It results that the logic underlying every philosophical interest traces back to the self-referring investigation about life in

the mode of self-consciousness, by which social practices and their history can be conceived. Similarly, self-consciousness, namely the aware life-form, is life through the concept (the Idea, the thought). Once we assess that self-consciousness properly is *life through the concept*, we would be able to realize the logical structure underlying the more practical aspects and themes characterizing the human kind like those of freedom, normativity, social recognition, social practices, law, personal competencies, world human history, etc. As a result of this approach, the course of human history and the development of social cooperative activities (like political institutions, culture, arts, trade, economy and commerce) would prove to be the consequent development of the already mentioned *life through the concept*, rather than random and unbound phenomena.

The very naturalistic kernel of this book is represented by the notion of self-conscious life and this because of two reasons. Firstly, self-consciousness is explained by Hegel as emerging from the living dimension of desiring, namely from a disposition that will turn out to be a speculative attitude towards the other. Without such attitude it would not be even possible to develop a concept, therefore we can state that thinking and speculation are closely related to the practical organization of the living. The second reason is related to the notion of life that in the *Science of Logic* is handled in the first chapter of the section about the Idea. Hegel clearly states that the concept in its immediacy has to be cognized in terms of life (Hegel *SL*, 677) because life can only be grasped in terms of conceptual forms. There is a strong affinity between life and thought because they are both practical forms ruled by a concept of themselves, namely by self-referentiality. In fact, the first chapter of the book addresses this aspect of the Hegelian philosophy and suggests a comparison with the more recent *enactivism* in philosophy of biology and philosophy of mind. Hegel's naturalism is indeed founded in his speculative logics what sheds light on the subject-object relation by accounting of the thinking subject as a living entity with a specific practical organization, which I already defined as *life through the concept*.

In this book I maintain that Hegel's philosophy represents a novel version of naturalism since it stresses the mutual dependence between nature and spirit, rather than just conceiving of spirit as a substance emerging and separating from bodily natural requisites. Alone considered, nature is, of course, a moment of spirit, precisely the first moment that Hegel considers as affected by externality and immediacy:² nature can only be regarded as the opposite

2 Hegel *PN*, § 245: "In the practical relationship which man establishes between himself and nature, he treats it as something immediate and external."

to the Idea and its determinations, by which it can be grasped and known, are mere external definitions. The reason why Hegel states that “nature has yielded itself as the Idea in the form of *otherness*”³ is because there is no self-determination in the natural sphere, in other words its determinations are external trimmings established by the act itself of thinking.⁴ *Philosophy of Nature* represents therefore the second book of his *Encyclopedia*—the work in which his entire system is explained—and can be considered as a secondary treatise in comparison to the strictly philosophical parts about *Subjective*, *Objective* and *Absolute Spirit*. However, referring to *Hegel’s naturalism* does not just mean dealing with his philosophy of nature, but rather with those natural aspects that are intrinsically and steadily related with self-consciousness and cognition. His naturalism can be regarded as an extension of Aristotle’s naturalism about the soul and its faculties. *On the Soul* is, in fact, a forerunner of the Hegelian philosophy of spirit in which human intellectual faculties are so tightly connected to more basic and natural dispositions such as nutrition, self-maintenance and perception that they cannot be thought as totally separated and independent. Similarly, Hegel’s entire philosophy of spirit does not clarify mental competencies as separated and independent from nature, but rather as strictly related to natural and biological features (the rational animal is an animal among the others). He points out their fundamental interdependence, and this is not a simple philosophy of nature, but rather integral part of the methodology deployed for dealing with self-consciousness, spirit, the concept and sociality. In his *Philosophy of Mind*, for instance, he states that “mind [*Geist*] has for its presupposition the nature, of which it is the truth and for that reason its absolute prius” (*PM*, § 381). This passage entails a naturalistic assessment about the relationship between nature and spirit since it underlies their reciprocal dependence and crossed stratification. Mind is not a mere distinct outcome of nature because it is steadily connected with it by being its “truth and absolute prius”. In other words, nature and spirit are not two different moments of a bottom-up development because this would undermine the possibility to understand their interdependence and constant connection that we observe in the rational living beings. They are, hence, permanently interwoven. Hegel’s thought consists in the attempt to clear this mutual dependence, which is supposed to persist once the spirit has emerged

3 Hegel *PN*, § 247.

4 Hegel *PN*, § 250: “The impotence of nature is to be attributed to its only being able to maintain the determinations of the Notion in an abstract manner, and to its exposing the foundation of the particular to determination from without.”

because the becoming of spiritual and self-conscious life lies on material and natural presupposes. The fact that there cannot be a mind outside the body and that it ought to be embedded in order to have the functions it has, is one of the most important achievement of Hegelian thinking in comparison to the previous modern philosophical tradition in which soul, mind and thinking are conceived as distinct from the body because of their divine origin. Even the final section of the *Encyclopedia* about *Absolute Spirit* could not be completely understood without making recourse to this methodology, as it represents the identity of the concept which “has returned into itself” (Hegel *PM*, § 554), namely a process within self-conscious life itself. It is not a supernatural process, but rather the result of a concrete unfolding of spiritual and ethical life realized within historical conditions, which ought to be traced back to natural premises, i.e. requisites that can be explained by means of the natural sciences. Hegel’s naturalism deals with the mutual, steady and crossed interdependence of nature and spirit, according to which nature (the first stage) is completely integrated within the further steps of spiritual life—including *Absolute Spirit*. It should not be confused with his philosophy of nature, it represents rather his philosophical way to understand cognitive, social, linguistic competencies and, more generally, self-conscious life. Obviously, there is a development from nature towards fully minded beings, however, it is not a mere transition “from the animal to the non-animal but rather from animals with a certain type of self-relation to animals with a very different self-relation” (Pinkard 2017, 6).⁵ Hegel, like Aristotle, considers cognitive and social faculties as features of a certain type of animal and his naturalism points out that the self-conscious way is one way among others of being alive, the way of the human kind. Of course, such reading does not disregard the fact that the counterpart of human autonomy in history is the self-realization of absolute freedom as the universal idea that makes historical freedom plausible and thinkable. In fact, with the absolute spirit we reach a metaphysical stage in which spirit is completely self-mediating and concerned with its own nature just as pure spirit. In this stage the absoluteness of the person, of human rights, values, ideas, etc. can be fully and speculatively considered as independent from the historical development and as objects of an idealistic philosophy. My naturalistic reading of Hegel

5 Pinkard 2017, 6: “Here is one way of starting. We are natural animals, but there is a way in which we are different from other animals. One way of thinking about that is to claim or try to demonstrate that there is something very “un-animal” about the stuff out of which we are constituted. That is not Hegel’s way. For him, there is a line that runs from nature to fully minded agents, but it is not a line that runs from the animal to the non-animal but rather from animals with a certain type of self-relation to animals with a very different self-relation.”

does not rule out absolute spirit, in fact it requires it as the unity by which the contingent aspects of spiritual life are thinkable. What my reading rules out is a conception of absolute spirit as substantial monism that commits us to give an account of a substantialist base for that unity. I believe that the fact that Hegel speaks of *der Geist* does not commit him to substantialist explanation any more than a biology textbook on “the lion” commits us thinking that there is a spiritual lion out there out of which individual lions emanate. It is a matter of philosophy to produce universal and absolute assessments about our forms of practices, like those about freedom, human dignity and the power of the laws, therefore the absolute spirit in spite of its non-historical nature is concretely linked to its finite form. Between spirit and absolute spirit we have the same kind of crossed interdependence that we have between nature and spirit: they are analyzed separately although they are part of the same *System von Stufen* as illustrated in the *Encyclopedia*. In this book I often refers to biological and naturalistic features of self-conscious life because the philosophy of spirit necessarily accounts for the natural requisites to which mind is bounded. Following this reading, absolute spirit ought to be conceived as the mediated unity of the different manifestations of spiritual life, namely the unity of their freedom. Thus, it has no ontological status because it just results from the explicit reflexion of the concept on itself through self-conscious life, and can be regarded as the highest moment of speculative thinking in which the universal character of freedom of life is highlighted (Khurana 2013, 18).

As I already mentioned, this book aims at dealing with a very classic argument of the philosophical inquire from the point of view of a classical thinker, however his thought turns out to shed light on several aspects of more recent philosophies. For instance, many issues concerning our understanding about normativity, human agency, philosophy of biology and philosophy of history can be successfully tackled through the lenses of the Hegelian thought. This book is, therefore, based on the dialogue between Hegel and contemporary thinkers and strives to enhance our understanding of theoretical and practical issues and to widen the grammar of the philosophical thought. For instance, authors like B. Brandom, M. Thompson, E. Thompson, M. Tomasello and others are quoted here although some of them are not strictly Hegelian scholars. My effort here has been to address contemporary philosophical issues through the theory of self-conscious life, its methodology and outcomes. Of course, the thought of those authors does not directly descend from Hegel, however, they share interesting aspects that clear up several philosophical issues: Brandom’s and Sellars’ conception of logical space of reason, E. Thompson’s enactivism, M. Thompson’s theory about life and practice, Tomasello’s notion of cultural evolution are here compared with Hegel’s philosophy and many similarities

and theoretic correspondences are highlighted. This demonstrates the extraordinary relevance of the notion of self-conscious life that elaborates a straightforward and accomplished explanation of both the natural and biological requisites of cognition and sociality and the more general notions of right, politics and human history.

The structure of this book mirrors its goal to deal with the logical implications of Hegel's formal analysis of the concept and self-conscious life, and also the order of the chapters is based on the necessary priority of orders of concepts over others. The more theoretical categories like those of speculation, speculative identity, life, self-conscious life, self-consciousness, perception and mind had to be addressed before more concrete aspects of this philosophy of spirit like normativity, freedom, right and human history, as the latter originate in the former. Therefore, I decided to avoid any chronological order and to handle the Hegelian works unitarily, and without considering the genesis and evolution of his own thought from the early to the late phase. This choice could probably disappoint austere and uncompromising historians of philosophy who usually put the focus on the different moments of one author's thinking and their commencement. However, I would like to point out that Hegel's thought, in spite of its unquestionable aging, presents similar traits throughout its entire development: 1) the attempt to elucidate thought and cognition by means of a thorough doctrine of speculation, 2) the interest for self-consciousness, its natural requisites and its bonds with associate life, 3) the role of social and political institutions in establishing normativity and individual purposiveness, 4) the investigation on the logical form of social and practical life. These issues do not only represent the fundamental bequest of Hegel's thought, they are also object of steady interest within present-day philosophical studies, what justifies the methodology of this book to highlight the theoretical implications of this great philosophy rather than its genesis and its place within history of philosophy.

The sequence of the chapters reflects the formal and logical implications of the nature-spirit relation on which Hegel's theory of self-conscious life is founded: the first chapter deals prevalently with the sections *Teleology* and *Life* in the *Science of Logic*, where I individuate the logical structure of Hegel's naturalism. In these chapters the relationship between the natural element of life and the cognitive element of the Idea is explained as a connection established by the concept itself, namely by our thought. Moreover, Hegel in these sections marks clearly the distinction with Kant's notion of teleology by conceiving of life as a crucial category of thinking necessary for introducing and explaining self-consciousness, the absolute idea and cognition. In this way his naturalism is successfully compared to Kant's transcendentalism what highlights the

importance of dealing with the natural element of life in order to straightforwardly elucidate cognition and the generation of self-consciousness.

The second chapter accounts for the notion of self-consciousness in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. In the *Science of Logic* self-consciousness is simply connected to life, in the *Phenomenology* its concrete, social and historical features are instead thoroughly handled. In particular, this chapter puts the focus on the relational nature of self-consciousness that sets up an independent bond to *otherness* and develops the basic structures of sociality and authority.

The third chapter tackles the very naturalistic issue of perception and the constitution of habits that Hegel addresses in the subsection A, *Anthropology* in his *Philosophy of Mind*. The reason of this choice lies in the fact that perception, unlike self-consciousness, is a natural faculty that does not require to be cleared by making recourse to logical notions, but rather just by placing it within a coherent system of living faculties and dispositions. Whereas the theory of self-consciousness illustrates the elementary and logical structure of the Self by correlating natural needs, autonomy, social recognition and sociality, the treatise about perception and habit concretely introduces the question concerning the person and her integration in the social context.

The fourth chapter on *Embodied and Extended Mind* aims at a renewed interpretation of the Hegelian controversial notion of *Geist* and points out the necessity to interpret it in terms of common or extended mind what meets the inquiries of recent philosophers (P. Pettit, for instance).

The fifth chapter gives an account of Hegel's definition of individual will within the social context. It can be regarded as a groundbreaking philosophy of action also based on a naturalistic interpretation of purposiveness.

Chapter 6 addresses the question of freedom and normativity especially in the *Philosophy of Right*. Chapter 7, eventually, tackles the controversial notion of world history and proposes a novel interpretation that connects it to the central thesis self-conscious life.

Science of Logic: The Logical Premises of Hegel's Naturalism

1

Hegelian scholars mostly agree that Hegel's naturalism largely relies on his conception of self-conscious life as a distinctive life-form able to place itself under an order of concepts autonomously elaborated and mold its own form of life through the notion of spirit [*Geist*]. This approach is surely correct although it partially disregards the fact that Hegel founds the legitimacy of his own naturalism on the *Science of Logic*, his very mature book in which the fundamental categories of thinking, and with them the structure of the reality, are deduced. Among these categories, at the end of the book he deals with the category of *Life*, which is supposed to introduce the absolute idea since “it is from the *idea of life* that the idea of spirit has emerged, or what is the same thing, that has demonstrated itself to be the truth of the idea of life”.¹ The spirit is, hence, the truth of the idea of life, although it has emerged from life. We reckon, hence, a mutual dependence between nature and spirit, since spirit is not merely a substance emerging and separating from the natural requisites of the living body. Hegel also maintains that cognition is already present in the biological domain in an unaware form when he states that “life, or organic nature, is the stage of nature where the concept comes on the scene, but as a blind concept that does not comprehend itself, that is, is not thought; only as self-aware and as thought does it belongs to spirit”.² This chapter on life represents the turning point of the *Subjective Logic* because it accounts for the logical stage in which the investigation about the notion or concept [*Begriff*]³ experiences the important switch from externality into inwardness. This transition is derived by the fact that the concept is a cognitive “tool” or requisite deployed by a living subject in order to grasp the relations of natural occurrences, and its analysis necessarily leads to the investigation about the subject bearing it. In other words, in order to understand the true and necessary character of the notion by which the relations of dependence within reality (causality, actuality, freedom, final end,

¹ Hegel *SL*, 694.

² Hegel *SL*, 517.

³ I will use both “notion” and “concept” for translating the German word *Begriff*.

etc.) can be grasped, an inquiry about the characteristics of the subject bearing it is needed. Therefore, any inquiry about the logics and the concept requires, at the end, giving an account of the self-conscious being and its life.

Hegel like Kant is convinced that understanding the subject bearing the concept is unavoidable for disclosing the thought and the nature of truth, and, in fact, both bind the investigation about the concept to the analysis of subjectivity. However, Kant assumes a transcendental approach and does not account for the subject as a real and natural one. Kantian “I think” is a mere condition for the synthetic judgment and this because synthesis necessarily requires that the object is unitarily grasped and understood, and this is only possible if the condition of unitary subjective apperception and representation is satisfied. Once Kant demonstrates that this condition is given as a transcendental requisite of thinking, he does not further investigate this subject because this would mean an inquiry about the subject as a *noumenon*, which cannot be known. Hegelian strategy is much more immanentist firstly because of his refusal of the distinction between *phenomenon* and *noumenon*. Following him, the subject as condition of thinking can be investigated because the concept can be naturalistically linked to the faculties of the living and can be finally disclosed as a concrete activity. This is the reason why the category of *Life* introduces the chapter about the Idea in the *Science of Logic*. As we will see, already in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* Hegel links the concept and the speculative disposition of self-consciousness to life and desire⁴ (Pippin 2011), however the connection between life and mind is much more exhaustively explained in the *Science of Logic*.

In order to understand the role of the logical category of life in that book, it is necessary to comprehend that the explanation of both self-consciousness and concept requires the switch from what Hegel calls externality, which is proper of mechanism and partially of the teleological systems, to some sort of inwardness. In fact, although the concept can be externally applied for grasping natural phenomena like the mechanical ones, it is also the internal feature through which knowledge and self-knowledge are organized. The concept of force, for instance, by which we explain every causal relation, is a concept

4 Hegel *PoS*, 108–109: “Thus the simple substance of Life is the splitting-upon itself into shapes and at the same time the dissolution of these existent differences ... Life consists rather in being the self-developing whole which dissolves its development and in this movement simple preserves itself ... self-consciousness is Desire. Certain of the nothingness of this other, it explicitly affirms that this nothingness is *for it* the truth of the other; it destroys the independent object and thereby gives itself the certainty of itself as a *true* certainty, a certainty which has become explicit for self-consciousness itself *in an objective manner*.”

that is autonomously elaborated by rational beings and that can be used for explaining natural facts like movements, acceleration, speed, energy, etc. Therefore, any logical inquiry is expected to address the concept not only as a cognitive stance, but also as the main characteristics of self-conscious life, and this is what Hegel does in his *Science of Logic*. In this book the relation between concept and self-consciousness is disclosed by accounting for both the inward character of the former (the fact that it must be borne by some subject) and for the close relation the latter has with life. The logical category of life represents, hence, the logical bond by which the inward feature of the concept can be related to a real and natural subjectivity able to borne it. With life the concept can be conceived as what determines the activity of thinking itself, rather than as a mere cognitive stance that can be externally and abstractly applied to some natural phenomenon. This unveils that the true nature of philosophical research is self-knowledge, namely exploring what we can define as *life through the concept*, i.e. the distinctive life-form of humankind.

The category of life is of utmost importance for self-consciousness because of two reasons: first, it is a category with many natural implications and is apt to function as a bridge between nature and self-consciousness; secondly, self-consciousness and the concept are conceived by Hegel as vital dispositions included in a both natural and logical system of grades [*System von Stufen*],⁵ which foresees the complete integration of each grade and does not conceive of any stage as separated by the entire. Cognition requires, hence, to be handled as a disposition concretely embedded in the logical system and not as an independent attitude subjected to different rules and principles. By addressing life in the *Science of Logic* Hegel accounts for the continuity between life and mind and pinpoints that mind cannot be disembodied because its features are connected to and dependent from the domain of biological life.

In order to explain subjectivity and its primary activity, namely thinking, Hegel deals with a treatise about conceptualization and claims that all relational facts are fundamentally explained by means of it. However, the concept is also self-reference and represents the unity of experiencing, therefore a treatise about the concept is also a treatise about the self-conscious living subject⁶

5 Hegel *PN*, § 249: "Nature is to be regarded as a *system of stages*, the one proceeding of necessity out of the others, and being the proximate truth of that from which it results. This is not to be thought of as a *natural* engendering of one out of the other however, but as an engendering within the inner Idea which constitutes the ground of nature."

6 Hegel *SL*, 516: "... this concept is the *unity of self-consciousness* into which that subject matter has been assumed; consequently its objectivity or the concept is itself none other than the nature of self-consciousness, has no other moments or determinations than the 'I' itself."

(from the point of view of the history of philosophy this assumption represents the transition from transcendental philosophy into speculative thinking; nonetheless, the influence of the *Critique of Pure Reason* is crucial here). In fact, the notion is not merely an external attribution necessary for explaining mechanical phenomena, it can also be an internal property of some entity which acts in conformity with it. This represents the fundamental switch from the category of mechanism to that of teleology in which Hegel tackles what he calls “inwardness of the notion”. In the mechanical, and for a great part also in the chemical phenomena the notion is externally determined by a thinking subject that understands them from outside and by using concepts like those, for example, of force, fusion, melting, pressure, etc. As we will discuss later, for the categories of teleology and life, instead, the notion has to be conceived as an internal property because of the purposiveness proper of teleological and living systems.

As also Kant maintains, the ideas we use for explaining the natural phenomena depend on the autonomous thinking activity of a self-conscious subject and explain the structure of reality, therefore explaining them requires accounting for the thinking subject deploying them. The core of the *Critique of Pure Reason* is, in fact, the *transcendental apperception*, namely the key condition for the unitary use of concepts, representations and sensibility. Similarly, a crucial issue in the Hegelian logic is represented by the thinking subject and its freedom because the logical categories of thinking can be inferentially articulated and can clarify the structure of reality only in presence of self-referentiality, necessarily linked to living subjectivity. In other words, the concept, conceived by Hegel as “kingdom of freedom”,⁷ requires to be investigated not only as external explanation of the natural phenomena, but also as inward feature of its own bearer. Hegel’s effort to account for what he calls “inwardness of the notion” is motivated by the fact that we can give a rationale for the possibility to think reality, namely for mind and cognition, only by investigating the entity in which the notion represents its own inward feature. Moreover, Hegel’s philosophy overcomes some issues connected to Kantian transcendentalism because it deals with the naturalistic conditions and aspects of the thinking subject, handling it as a living entity supplied with distinctive natural features such as cognition and autonomy.

7 Hegel *SL*, 513: “In the concept, therefore, the kingdom of freedom is disclosed. The concept is free because the identity that exists in and for itself and constitutes the necessity of substance exists at the same time as sublated or as positedness, and this positedness, as self-referring, is that very identity.”

The logical category that we use for explaining that entity in which the cause is inward is teleology because it explains reality as the result of a final internal end, i.e. an end related to the phenomenon itself from within. Teleology represents a turning point in the *Science of Logic* because it clears up that there are phenomena determined by a concept or final end that is internally connected to the way those phenomena are. This turning point opens up a theoretical path that will accompany us to clarify life, self-consciousness, knowledge, truth and the absolute idea. In fact, accounting for a teleological phenomenon means accounting for self-referentiality, namely for the possibility that the concept is internally determined, rather than being externally established like in mechanism. The Hegelian effort to account for the inwardness of the notion aims at explaining systems that are autonomously produced and generated by inner conditions and patterns of agency. These systems differ from mechanical and chemical orders because their concept is integral part of the system itself and governs the internal relations of the different functions within it. Hegel also underlines that such systems are characterized by the compulsion to actualize their own final end by negating any external determination. This is the reason why he conceives of the teleological system as a “self-referring negative unity”,⁸ i.e. unity of coordinated functions that are self-governed and that “negate” external conditionings affecting the autonomy of their own order. The reason why teleology is considered in the section about *Objectivity* in the *Science of Logic* is linked to Kant’s approach to this issue. Kant introduces teleology in the *Critique of Judgment* where he states that there are some reflective judgments pointing out the teleological characteristics of living creatures that cannot be completely explained by means of the category of cause. According to Kant, this kind of judgment is merely *heuristic* because it just describes purposive entities without knowing anything about them. In other words, he subordinates the use of this kind of judgment to efficiently causal explanations depending on the category of cause that he handled in the first *Critique*. Hegel’s prefers, instead, to deal with teleology systematically, namely as a category perfectly integrated into the logical system of thinking and not as a mere correlate of epistemologically more objective categories. He chooses, therefore, to place this category in the chapter about objectivity because it is logically perfectly deducible that an object can also be thought by means of an internally related cause and not only by virtue of external ones. We will

8 Hegel *SL*, 673.

see how the notion of life represents a further step into the explanation of the concept as an inward reason of living entities, however both teleological and living entities share the same principle of “negative self-reference” that I mentioned above and that distinguishes them from mechanical entities governed by external causes.

Teleology is a logical category that we apply to living systems, namely to systems bearing some purposiveness or final end, which explains their features without making recourse to any external cause. This kind of systems can be considered as self-generating or *autopoietic* if we conceive of their final end as the self-maintaining and self-reproducing condition required for the existence of the system itself. However, as also Kant highlights, the final end itself cannot be considered as self-generated, because it has to be linked to some cause that triggers it. In other words, in the analysis of a teleological system the question about the external cause persists, in fact, although the final purpose operates as an internal cause, it can be generated by external factors. This is the reason why the category of teleology in the *Critique of Judgment* has a mere heuristic function making us able to describe the biological function of an organism, although it does not yield any conditioned and objective knowledge. Teleology is, hence, not applicable for obtaining an objective judgment about the biological organisms since it explains a phenomenon (the final purposiveness), which can only be understood as the effect of some external cause, namely it can be known exclusively by making recourse to a different category (that of cause). In other words, according to Kant, the category of cause remains the primary source of knowledge even when we are investigating biological systems that apparently differ from mechanical entities.⁹ Therefore, Kant does not include the teleological category among the categories of the pure reason as he does not conceive of it as a formal concept of knowledge.

In contrast, Hegel places teleology within his *Science of Logic* and treats it as a very important category of thinking coming just before the final section about the idea of knowledge. He, in fact, believes that the explanation of thinking requires an investigation on the inward character of the concept and that this inwardness takes place in the category of teleology, which represents the turning point of the subjective logic, namely the point in which the concept is treated as internal to some entity. However, teleology represents just the premise necessary for introducing the category of life (treated in the first chapter of the last section of the *Science of Logic*) in which the autonomous

9 A good contribution about the differences between Kant's and Hegel's accounts for teleology is Kreines 2008.

character of biological systems can be better explained, since life accounts for an infinite internal concept, namely a concept completely free of externality. Hegel's approach to the category of life leads to an *enactive* conception of final end, namely a conception underlining the autonomous and self-referential character of biological systems. Life represents indeed a step forward in comparison to teleology, exactly because it aims at highlighting the inner and non-externally determined nature of life, what entails the requisites for infinite self-referentiality and negativity proper also of self-consciousness.

The relation between the chapters on teleology and life is very interesting if one puts the focus on the necessary evolution of the concept from being conceived as a mere external attribution of mechanism to becoming the internal and self-positing property of biological entities. Purposiveness is, in fact, attributed to teleological agencies because they are determined by the compulsion to realize their own end. For this reason the concept in teleology is still affected by externality, although it also expresses a form of self-determination and self-positing due to the internal character of the final purposiveness. In order to overcome this externality we have to deduce a category in which the self-positing and self-determined character of the concept is totally related to and dependent on the system bearing it, because only in this way the concept can be considered as inward and free from external determination. Achieving the inwardness of the concept would make us able to contemplate a system of agency whose internal functions are completely determined by the autonomous and self-sufficient maintenance of the notion, namely a self-positing system that is not limited to the realization of single purposes because it is infinite self-reference.¹⁰ In other words, teleology explains finite final ends whereas the concept requires to be borne by a system based on infinite self-referentiality. In fact, only infinite self-referentiality furnishes the requisites of independence from any external description and determination, whilst teleological systems are described by means of simple purposiveness.

Hegel's conclusion is that life is a category of thinking from which we may deduce self-consciousness and the Idea (namely the objective concept) because of the self-referring infinite character of the individual living being.

10 Hegel *SL*, 679: "The concept of life or universal life is the immediate idea, the concept that has an objectivity corresponding to it ... The infinite reference of the concept to itself is as negativity a self-determining, the diremption (sic.) of itself within itself *as subjective singularity and itself as indifferent universality*. The idea of life in its immediacy is as yet only the creative universal soul. Because of this immediacy, the first internal negative reference of the idea is the self-determination of itself *as concept—an implicit* positing which is *explicit* only as a turning back into itself ...".

The reason why life is the Idea as blind and in its immediacy depends on the fact that living entities own the fundamental requisite proper of concept, namely “infinite self-referring negativity”, by which the object can be related to the living subject itself and its independence can be sublated by means of the speculative characteristics of concept (see Hegel *DS*). Concept and self-consciousness are, therefore, based on the same logical characteristic and disposition of *self-referred negativity* that we observe in life and one can, eventually, state that there is a continuity between life and mind and that cognitive patterns share the same features with biological patterns. Hegel’s conception of mind is a form of enactivism based on the assumption that self-consciousness is not a transcendental cognitive disposition, as Kant maintained, but rather a speculative disposition rooted in the final and infinite self-positing and self-determinedness of biological existence. Mind and life share the same structure of self-referring negativity because both are constituted by an act of self-reference, namely reference to internal conditions of existence and consciousness, negating external conditioning. As we saw, a living system relies on internal biological functions, which take place by means of negativity, namely by negating external conditionings and affirming self-determination. This is the reason why the negation of external conditioning is so important for logically comprehend the compulsion and the vital force of individual life facing otherness’ independence.

3

As we have already seen, the probably most compelling aspect of the category of teleology is the fact that it introduces the domain of individual life since biological entities are determined by an internal notion and not by external factors and are comparable to teleological systems. Life becomes, hence, object of philosophical investigation because our thinking contemplates the possibility that there are entities whose cause is their own final end, rather than external factors. Hegel recognizes that it has been Kant’s great merit having introduced “objective purposiveness as a principle for the possibility of things of nature” (Kant *CJ*, 236). In fact, Kant accounts for what he calls “causality of purposes” and claims that in nature there are phenomena that are not exclusively causally explainable, although he also maintains that the principle of purposiveness is not a-priori.¹¹ In other words, Kant accounts for

¹¹ Kant *CJ*, 236: “...we are saying that nature, considered as mere mechanism, could have structured itself differently in a thousand ways without hitting on precisely the unity in

the teleological judgment but also underlines that it is problematic and cannot be conceived as determinative, namely as a judgment of knowledge, but rather as merely reflective or heuristic. In spite of this limitation, Kant's contribution to the question has been crucial because he started to conceive of teleology not merely as a question concerning the general opposition freedom-necessity, but rather concerning how an internal notion determines biological life and agency. Hegel himself claims that it was a mistake of the previous philosophical tradition to link the teleological principle to an extramundane intelligence and that it is necessary to cognize "the properties of nature not as extraneous, but as immanent *determinacies*" (Hegel *SL*, 652). Kant's teleological judgment represents an important theoretical attainment because by individuating an immanent determinacy for the teleological principle like an individual subject or a biological entity, one can conceive of this principle not as heterogeneous to nature but rather as concrete and effective. Before this achievement, there was no alternative to accept the primacy of mechanism since the extramundane conception of teleology was not suitable to anchor the end to something immanent and observable. With the introduction of the subjective end the role of the notion changes because it can now be treated as internal to a concrete entity and defined as purposiveness. Like Kant, Hegel does not conceive of the final end as something external to the subject but rather as inward purposiveness necessarily introducing the issue of "*something determined in and for itself* and consequently self-determining, ... *a unity that is reflected into itself, something that is determined in and for itself* and is consequently a content".¹² Teleology is, thus, the category of logic explaining an entity whose cause is its own internal purpose, or notion. In this category the notion is directly and internally related and establishes the self-posed and self-referential character of teleological systems, which act and behave following internal patterns of agency.

Such self-referential character represents the fundamental feature of the speculative identity that Hegel already tackles in his early works like the *Differenschrift* and the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, where he claims that subjectivity develops a special relation towards the object, aiming at negating the

terms of a principle of purposes, and so we cannot hope to find a priori the slightest basis for that unity unless we seek it beyond the concept of nature rather than in it. Yet we are right to bring teleological judging into our investigation of nature, at least problematically, but only if we do this so as to bring nature under principles of observation and investigation by analogy with the causality in terms of purposes, without presuming to explain it in terms of that causality."

¹² Hegel *SL*, 653.

independence of the latter by placing it under an order of concepts and understanding it as the product of spontaneous activity of the subject itself. In fact, the subject with internal purposiveness is self-positing and relates itself to the rest by means of its own particular end that is “an essential striving and impulse to posit itself externally” (Hegel *SL*, 657), or in other words to realize its own end by facing the resistance of the objective external world. Such inwardness of the end entails what Varela and E. Thompson call “organizational closure” (Varela 1979: 55–60 and E. Thompson 2007: 44–45), namely a self-referential and internal network of relations defining a biological system as an autonomous and self-generating unity. In my opinion, Hegel defines teleology in a similar way when he claims that subjective end is “absolutely negative unity” (Hegel *SL*, 659) whose objectivity is the self-determined character of its inner purpose, namely the sublation of the external reality by means of the maintenance of the self-referential network of relations establishing its biological unity. Subject’s compulsion to realize its own end determines the relation to the immediacy of reality, which is negated as independent and related to some objective internal purpose (Hegel *SL*, 658–659). Hegel is here dealing with the self-positing character of subjectivity as it emerges through the analysis of the category of teleology and claims that subjectivity and its behavior within the objective surrounding are shaped by this self-referentiality. He legitimates in this way his early reflection about the subject-object relation by tackling the question about the final end of subjectivity and explaining life through the analysis of both logical and organic requisites. The result of this analysis is that the category of teleology does not only explain the self-determined character achieved by subjectivity, but also that kind of speculative relation with otherness based on the so called *absolutely negative unity*.

In fact, the relation that subjectivity establishes with otherness is not equal since it is for the most part determined by the self-relation the subject has with its own internal end and by the urge to objectively realize it. This subject has what Varela calls “surplus of signification” in comparison to the mechanical world due to the peculiar function of purposiveness. This surplus depends on the compulsion of subjectivity to actualize its own internal end and to posit itself as determined by an inner concept of itself. By virtue of this self-referentiality the objective reality can be conceived by the subject as what is related to itself and not as independent, in other words self-referentiality pushes for the sublation of otherness’ independence. This represents an important cognitive turn in our understanding of the subject-object relation because it does not only highlights the primacy of the autonomous cognitive dispositions, but it also relates them to the natural and biological features of subjectivity. Both Varela and E. Thompson argue that their conception of

biological organism as a self-generating unity with internal design and closure has many aspects in common with Kant's teleology, which states that organisms have an intrinsic purposiveness by which they can be considered as a self-producing and self-organizing beings (Kant *CJ*, 253).¹³ However, Varela and E. Thompson disregard the fact that Hegel's treatise of teleology in comparison to Kant's one has the advantage to put it in a system aiming at clarifying the contribution of life in the emergence of rational dispositions within the biological organism. In contrast to Kant, Hegel believes that the notion does not attain its truth through the mere teleological subject, which is determined by its own end and the urge to realize it. In fact, this realization is conditioned by an end with a finite content (Hegel *SL*, 663), whereas mind represents the edge of speculative activity, namely freedom and self-determining identity, and is supposed not to be affected by any conditioning. At the end of the chapter on teleology Hegel reveals the limit of the logical category of teleology from which he can infer the category of life. Teleology merely explains ends with a conditioned goal whose form is limited by an external individuality: "The restricted content renders these purposes inadequate to the infinity of the concept, relegating them to untruth" (Hegel *SL*, 666). The eagerness to realize itself renders the final end a subjective fact and deprives the notion of concrete totality and self-determining identity due to the externally conditioned character of the purpose. In other words, with teleology we are able to explain the subjective final end as a principle conditioned and limited to its own realization. In order to avoid this limited character, it is necessary to address a form of self-relatedness which is not conditioned by the subjectivity itself but rather determined by the universal logical function of the concept. It is thus necessary to sublate teleology, which depicts a *lifeless* self-relatedness and account for a broader conception of final self-relational structure not bounded to any subjective purpose. This will be possible by originally linking the mind to life.

The introduction of the notion of life as the enhancement of the treatise about the final end represents an important theoretical achievement aiming at naturalizing the logical relations that the living subject has with the external surrounding. We have already mentioned that Hegel describes the subject-object relation as a relationship that is established by means of the logical and cognitive disposition the subject has towards external reality, called by him

13 Varela 1991, 86: "The difference between environment and world is the surplus of signification which haunts the understanding of the living and of cognition, and which is at the root of how a self becomes one. It is quite difficult in practice to keep in view the dialectics of this mutual definition: neither rigid isolation, nor simple continuity with physical chemistry."

also *otherness*. Fichte also conceived of this disposition as infinite and, consequently, as the source of freedom for human subjectivity. However, he failed to explain this feature as a real one because of his transcendental approach, which does not deal with the concrete and real nature of infinite freedom. He just explained it as the abstract condition of the subjective experience without anchoring it to the substantial and ontological characteristics of a living subjectivity. Hegel instead undertakes a very articulated analysis and unfolds subjectivity as the outcome of the mutual dependence it has with the objectivity. This leads him to investigate the natural requisites of subjectivity on whose basis he can elucidate its infinite and autonomous nature. In this sense he brings on Aristotle's project to understand intellectual and ethical dispositions out of the natural and biological characteristics of the soul, which are also regarded as shared with any other living being. The novelty of Hegel's naturalism consists in the fact that he undertakes a coordinated analysis of both the logical properties of cognitive dispositions and the biological requisites of the living subject and merges them by the notion of mind conceived as the aware faculty of rational beings. In this way he is able to place cognitive dispositions within a real immanent living entity and avoid the transcendental mistake to investigate them as mere abstract conditions of experience.

4

How should we more empirically conceive of the logical functions of self-referentiality and absolutely self-referred negativity by which Hegel describes the fundamental feature of life? In fact, life can be also handled as the argument of empirical observation since we distinguish living from lifeless entities, we attribute life to empirical occurrences and we empirically investigate the biological features of living matter. Hegel was absolutely right to consider life as a fundamentally logical category of reality that cannot be gleaned by virtue of its empirical observation because it requires a definition elaborated through inferential deduction. We conceive of life as a different category from mechanism because logical and deductive thought contemplates a system based on living requisites like generation and self-maintenance and differentiates this from those systems depending on causal necessity. Nevertheless, life is empirically attributed to observational entities and its understanding is also enhanced by means of the empirical sciences, which offer interesting outlooks even from a philosophical perspective.

I have already highlighted that the inwardness proper of life, according to Hegel, can be assimilated to what biologists and philosophers of biology like

Maturana, Varela and E. Thompson call “operational closure”, namely an inner and self-referential networks of functions constituting a biological entity. More specifically, the constitution of the cell has unique observable behaviors diverging from chemical and mechanical processes and in which we reckon self-referentiality and negation of external conditionings. I am speaking about the constitution of the cell and its self-maintenance, two phenomena in which we observe the specific behavior of cells and single-celled organisms in relation to the external surrounding. The cell has a permanent relationship to the external surrounding as this supplies it with fundamental nutrients, therefore it can be considered as an “open system, continually exchanging matter and energy with its environment” (E. Thompson 2007, 98). In spite of this openness, we also observe an ongoing circular process in which the cell continuously produces and reproduces itself, namely it determines its features and activities. This happens because the cell also constitutes a membrane that establishes the border between its inner activities and the external surrounding, what enables the “operational closure” by which it emerges as an independent entity out of the chemical background of the molecular soup. The membrane “serves as a barrier to free diffusion between the cell and the environment, but also permits the exchange of matter and energy across the boundary” (E. Thompson 2007, 98), and this explains the metabolic process by which the nutrient enters from outside and is deployed for the cell sustainment through a process of chemical transformation rendering the nutrient apt to be assimilated by the cell. Both the membrane and the metabolic process point out that the cell entails a “surplus of significance” in comparison to the organic surrounding because the former produces and reproduces itself by autonomously distinguishing itself from the latter. In other words, we observe a process of self-recognition that is distinctive of living entities and cannot be detected in mechanical phenomena. In fact, by means of the metabolic process the cell is able to regenerate its own components including the membrane boundary, which is necessary in order that the chemical components of the cell are prevented from being dispersed in the surrounding. Moreover, the membrane is necessary also for the exchange of biological matter, which is needed as nutrient. What does this behavior of the cell tells us? It tells us that even the primitive forms of biological systems are based on three fundamentals requisites: 1) self-distinction from the external surrounding enabled by the autonomous development of a membrane; 2) maintenance and self-reproduction of the network of functions: it is assured by the nutrient absorbed through the membrane, which has, hence, the double function of both dividing from and establishing a relation with the surrounding; 3) the chemical transformation of the nutrient regenerates the components of the cell by reproducing them, namely by recreating the same

biological pattern of functions. On these three aspects Varela bases his ideas of “operational closure” and “surplus of significance” proper of the cells, which differ from other chemical processes where we reckon a transformation of chemical or organic matter without, however, having either the constitution of a boundary or the reproduction of the similar biological patterns by the assimilation of the nutrient.

When Hegel addressed the issue of life in the *Science of Logic* he wanted to highlight the difference between life and the mechanical and chemical processes by giving an account of the question of self-referentiality and self-positeness. Although he did not have at hand the same knowledge about cells we have now, he was able to theoretically deduce a very similar pattern of distinctions from the mechanical and chemical domain. In fact, the mechanical entities are characterized by externality since the effect is determined by an external and independent cause. The chemical process very partially entails an irrelevant form of inwardness since the constituents of this process have the internal chemical properties for becoming what they become. If we consider, as example, the phenomenon of merging of two metals, we see that it produces a third metal as result of the chemical features of the previous two. However, also in chemistry externality is dominant because we do not observe an inner principle autonomously posited by any Self. Teleology is indeed a category very similar to life because of the internal and self-posed nature of the final purpose that practically operates as internal cause determining the features of the teleological entity. However, teleology explains a subject determined by a finite end whereas self-determination should satisfy the conditions of *infinite* self-positing and self-generation. In spite of this limitation, teleology is a very important category for understanding life because it brings onto the scene the logical principle of *absolutely self-referred negativity* that is a function with many aspects in common with the conditions of surplus of signification, operational closure and *auto-poiesis* deployed by Varela and E. Thompson for explaining living systems. In fact, self-referentiality is what we observe in cell's operational closure that is based on a circular, internal and recursive network of functions defining the system as a unity.¹⁴ This network works by means of self-referentiality since it is not determined by external conditionings by virtue

14 E. Thompson 2007, 45–46: “Organizational closure refers to the self-referential (circular and recursive) network of relations that defines the system as a unity, and operational closure to the reentrant and recurrent dynamics of such a system. An autonomous system is always structurally coupled to its environment ... Such systems need to be seen as sources of their own activity, specifying their own domains of interaction, not as transducers or functions for converting input instructions into output products.”

of the membrane that separates it from the external molecular and organic surrounding. By means of the membrane the cell can operate freely from external conditionings and without being determined by the chemistry of the external organic matter, and this is what Hegel calls negativity, namely negation to be determined by external circumstances.

With the notion of absolutely self-referred negativity Hegel addresses an autonomous system that is not externally determined, but rather determined by means of the internal relation of its functions. Such system is also expected to be self-generated or *auto-poietic* because its structure emerges as independent and separated by the surrounding. Obviously, self-generation does not mean generation from nothing, it rather means generation by self-separation and by constituting an independent system established by the maintenance of the system itself. As E. Thompson correctly maintains, in “an autonomous system, the constituent processes (i) recursively depend on each other for their generation and their realization as a network, (ii) constitute the system as a unity in whatever domain they exist, and (iii) determine a domain of possible interactions with the environment” (E. Thompson 2007, 44). In a living cell the constituent processes are chemical, “their recursive interdependence takes the form of a self-producing, metabolic network that also produces its own membrane; and this network constitutes the system as a unity in the biochemical domain and determines a domain of possible interactions with the environment” (E. Thompson 2007, 44). Although Hegel does not investigate the metabolic process nor the constitution of the membrane, his conception of life is quite sympathetic with the enactive approach by which the mind is conceived as emerging from the self-organizing processes of life, progressively interconnecting the brain to the body by means of the fact that it has the same constitution as the other organic functions. In order to defend his enactivism, Hegel strictly connects the characteristics of the living to the mind and even assume that life is the Idea itself in an unaware form. Consequently, the final effort needed for explaining the continuity between mind and life is to understand how the Idea can become aware and been actualized in mindful and self-conscious subjects.

5

Hegel conceives of mind basically as a speculative activity that is rooted in the subjectivity and has natural requisites. He is, in fact, more interested in investigating the cognitive and speculative dispositions, than in explaining the propositional nature of knowledge. He maintains that language is a

competence acquired through social integration and deployed for social goals, but he does not conceive of knowledge as the result of the appropriateness or adequateness of the utterances about the world. He is rather convinced that knowledge entails the apprehension of the object by means of the concept [*Begriff*], a word that in German is related to the verb *greifen* that means both grasping and seizing. He conceives of mind as a faculty that originates in the practical and living dispositions of the subject, rather than as an instrument necessary for formulating truthful sentences about the natural facts empirically observed. Mind takes place, hence, as a speculative activity of the subject facing the object and autonomously establishing a border between inner and outer reality, namely between the domain of freedom and self-sufficiency and the domain of causal necessity. The reflection about the constitution of the subject as a sphere of independence and autonomy separated from the domain of necessity and dependence is what clarifies the speculative attitude of this subject towards the outer reality whose independence the self-aware subject denies.

Hegel's conception of subjectivity differs from Descartes' one because it is not based on the tautological identity of the subject, but rather on an identity developed and shaped through the confrontation with the outer environment. Hegel's subject builds its identity and awareness by understanding the relation to the object in terms of freedom from external conditionings, rather than by enclosing itself within the borders of the *Cogito ergo sum*. The result is that human mind understands the external object by sublating its independence and placing it under an order of principles autonomously yielded. Speculative identity is built by establishing a relationship with the external reality, rather than by segregating the subject within the perimeter of the tautological identity $I=I$. It is achieved by three distinct steps: 1) negating the independence of the object; 2) establishing the relation between subject and object on the basis of subjective conditions; 3) finally, understanding the subject-object opposition as a positive fact ruled by the subject itself. In other words, the subject-object opposition becomes objective due to the subjective disposition and urge to understand it as an objective condition of reality that can be managed through an order of concepts autonomously yielded and not as a mere resistance to knowledge. This resistance can be rather included into the rational sphere because of the self-related nature of subjectivity conceiving of the object as something related and not independent. The fact that the subjective relation to an object is objective represents the fundamental relational scheme of self-consciousness and the way through which intersubjective relationships of dependence can be conceived as objective. The identity of the subject is hence constituted by the speculative effort to sublimate otherness' independence

and to master it, rather than by the tautological definition of the borders of the subjective domain as distinct from the objective one. This sustains the idea that the concept, namely the fundamental cognitive tool according to Hegel, is infinite and able to understand every relation of dependence constituting the reality, making, thus, the subject free and autonomous within the natural domain of causal necessity.

Since the *Science of Logic* considers these requisites of self-conscious life as already elucidated in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, it explains the nature of the concept and its relationship to subjectivity. Therefore, in this book mind is clarified by addressing the concept, because the former only attains its aware shape in the latter, namely in human subjectivity. In fact, in this experiential conception of knowledge, the act of comprehension of reality is unfolded by the conceptual activity of mind, by which self-consciousness understands the system of inferential relations and its necessary character. Understanding the necessity of reality represents the fundamental requisite to be free as a subject constituted through the relation with the external and objective dimension. However, the concept is a logical category that mind deploys for also understanding mechanical phenomena and not only for explaining the structure of self-consciousness. In fact, it deploys the notion for understanding the relational phenomena, namely those entities that are not explainable by substantiating a definition, but rather by describing a relation. The conceptual is deployed, hence, for understanding reality from an observer perspective and not only for sake of the speculative goal to understand one's own place within reality by linking the object to the subject. The explanation of the mechanical relations, for instance, is possible by applying a concept like those of cause, force, effect, etc. to natural phenomena from the external perspective of an observer. The transition from mechanism to life clears that the concept supplies self-consciousness with self-reference and self-determination by being understood as inward. The formal analysis of this transition from the externality to the inwardness of the concept is the most compelling aspect of the *Science of Logic* if one intends to address Hegel's naturalism and philosophy of mind because it highlights the necessity to introduce the category of life in order to explain the constitution of self-consciousness and the related inwardness of the concept.

6

According to Hegel, human cognitive capacities are strictly connected to life because, as we have already highlighted, the biological substance supplies the

individual with the fundamental speculative disposition for attaining cognition, namely the self-maintaining and self-generated operative closure struggling to be objective and unconditioned. Nonetheless, in life the Idea “is still internally unrealized *concept*”¹⁵ because its universality is actualized only by the genus or species [*die Gattung*], which represents the concept or representation of a form of life. The self-aware subject bearing mind and cognition is conceived by Hegel as a living subject characterized by the same biological requisites proper of every living being in which the Idea is still present in an unaware form. Mind is conceived by Hegel as a biological function that can be enacted by a living entity by virtue of principles and norms that are biologically and naturally inscribed in its organic homeostasis. This immanent and naturalistic conception of cognitive activity is in opposition to Kantian transcendentalism about knowledge. The famous Hegelian critique to both Kant’s transcendental conception of “I think” and the related paralogism of rational psychology is, indeed, possible because he succeeds in handling cognition as a natural purpose. Following Kant’s paralogism, modern rationalism is misled to regard the activity of “I think” as the activity of a substantial subject because it does not acknowledge that the “I think” is a mere transcendental representation necessary for explaining a-priori knowledge, what, however, does not elucidate what a thinking subject really is due to its *noumenic* and unknowable nature. The reason why Kant does not contemplate the category of *Life* in the *Critique of Pure Reason* is probably no omission, but rather an inattention that implies the impossibility to correctly dealing with the self-conscious subject as a real entity. The *Science of Logic* has instead the merit to clearly address this category and to make it the basis for explaining knowledge and self-conscious life.

Hegel succeeds in systematically placing the question of final end and life in his logic and to treat them as natural preconditions of both the rational faculty and self-knowledge. Consequently, he is able to conceive of the thinking subject as the aware actualization of requisites already present in what we observe in living beings and he can, therefore, claim to overcome the metaphysical stand-off of modern thinking about soul by making recourse to “the genuinely *speculative* ideas of the older philosophers on the concept of spirit”.¹⁶ In other words, his critique to the Kantian argument about the paralogism of rational psychology is corroborated by his naturalistic conception of mind and cognition, which relies on a systematical and inferential deduction from the logical

15 Hegel *SL*, 689.

16 Hegel *SL*, 691.

category of life. Kant's limit is having disregarded the question of teleology in the *Critique of Pure Reason* and having conceived of it in the *Critique of Judgment* as a mere heuristic concept subdued to the primacy of the category of causality. Hegel in the *Science of Logic*, instead, defends the primacy of teleology over mechanism by maintaining that in the former the concept already actualizes the inward and self-determining principle that we also scrutinize in life and mind. By this analysis he systematically connects the final cause to the cognitive aspects and highlights that self-determination is the common characteristic of life and mind, avoiding Kantian skepticism about the possibility to conceive of teleology as an objective category. Moreover, his treatise about teleology and life aims at highlighting that life is much more intelligible than mechanism because they more closely meet the Idea, which definitely requires the living for attaining a complete intelligibility and the spirit for a complete actualization by means of the social and practical organization of self-conscious individuals. Mechanical phenomena can indeed be truth and their origin can be possibly better unveiled in comparison to the origins of life, however their intelligibility is subordinated to the empirical observation, whereas the intelligibility of self-conscious life is the result of the investigation of a self-referred principle that we disclose in terms of absolute idea.¹⁷ This switch from knowledge to self-self-knowledge is possible because living beings meet the standard of an internal concept, namely of a concept that cannot be elucidated as the outcome of an external cause but rather as the explication of self-referentiality. In Hegel's philosophy life represents hence the possibility itself of rendering self-conscious life the true object of philosophical knowledge.

17 James Kreines rightly underlines this aspect in Kreines (2009), 375–376: “So when we explain, for example, the rotation of planets in terms of necessary laws governing matter, we are not making a mistake or accepting a merely subjective appearance of something that is in truth or most fundamentally an organic or teleological phenomenon. Rather, mechanistic phenomena are perfectly real but only imperfectly intelligible. Living beings are more completely intelligible. And, ultimately, the only thing that is perfectly intelligible is us—or, more precisely, the general kind or *Gattung* whose instances are thinking and self-conscious beings. Hegel calls this kind *Geist* [mind or spirit]. In Hegel's terms, there is a standard of complete intelligibility—“the Idea.” And although everything is intelligible to some degree, most everything falls far short of the standard. The standard of “the idea” is met some degree by living beings, and completely only by *Geist*.”

7

Hegel's criticism towards Kant's transcendental conception about the thinking subject points out the efficacy of his naturalism to avoid both the dogmas of modern metaphysics and the limits of transcendentalism by introducing a concept of self-consciousness based on natural requisites that can be systematically explained and connected. Whereas modern rationalism, especially Mendelssohn's, claimed that the persistence of soul is proved on the basis of its simplicity, Hegel points out that mind, soul and all the cognitive capacities can only be understood if we conceive of them as emerging from the natural ground represented by life and the living dispositions.¹⁸ The difference between these two approaches is that the former maintains that the nature of the soul can be understood by making recourse to an abstract definition of its feature (namely, its simplicity), whereas the latter analyzes mind as systematically related to natural properties and requisites determining what it is. Consequently, the former is exposed to the Kantian criticism that essential features cannot be attributed on the basis of a mere a-priori definition of the object of investigation, whilst the latter is based on the inferential deduction of logical categories. Hegel is, in fact, able to provide an analysis connecting life and mind in an ordered way, namely in a way in which the logical aspects of these two categories of thinking are explained and substantiated as reciprocally comparable and germane due to the function of self-referentiality that, as we have seen, they share.

The fact that the self-conscious subject is explained as a living subject and not as a transcendental representation of the activity of thinking radically changes our way to make intelligible the cognitive capacities and highlights that they are connected to the natural and living set-up. This entails the naturalization of thinking by stressing that the function of speculative identity is not only a theoretical disposition, but rather the very natural characteristic of subjectivity. Human cognition is, hence, the universal actualization of life in the form of inferential knowledge, namely in the form of the concept grasping reality by means of the syllogism. Knowledge is supposed to be the internal representation of the necessary structure of reality elaborated by means of the autonomous act of thinking, which is actually the explanation of the categories

18 Hegel *SL*, 694: "In the context of this logical exposition, it is from the idea of life that the idea of spirit has emerged, or what is the same thing, that has demonstrated itself to be the truth of the idea of life. As this result, the idea possesses its truth in and for itself, with which one may then also compare the empirical reality or the appearance of spirit to see how far it accords with it."

of the *Science of Logic* itself. In this autonomous act of conceptualization the thinking subject unlike the other living beings is free because its self-awareness enjoys the apprehension of reality, what makes him free through the truth and not merely through the actualization of a form of life.

Hegel's theory of truth is based on the very Kantian principle that subjectivity has an autonomous role in shaping knowledge due to the a-priori nature of the categories it applies to the given. In contrast to Kant, however, he naturalizes the transcendental approach on subjectivity by claiming that subjective mind is originally *impulse* from which the impulse towards truth emerges.¹⁹ This impulse is actually the speculative impulse that he accounts for in the *Differenzschrift*, namely the impulse to sublate the subject-object opposition by superseding both the particularity of subjectivity and the independence of the object. According to Hegel, although knowledge is based on the formal notion of truth as correspondence, it also depends from a subject that he describes has having properties that can be exclusively explained by means of a naturalized method of scrutiny and by linking them to life. Seeking truth is a speculative impulse based on the relation that the autonomous subject establishes with the object in order to supersede its independence. However, Hegel also accounts for the formal nature of truth by stating that the subject has to assume the object as objective in order to overcome the idea of truth as mere impulse and to attain truth as correspondence of concept and object. In other words, knowledge is the activity of determining the object through the concept and this determination has to conceive of the object as existing *in itself* in order to overcome the finite nature of that impulse and make knowledge speculative.²⁰ The syllogism represents the formal nature of knowledge in which the subjective idea becomes objective by virtue of the premise in

19 Hegel *SL*, 697: "At first the subjective idea is impulse ... Consequently this impulse is the impulse of truth in so far as the truth is in cognition, and therefore of truth in its strict sense as theoretical idea."

20 Hegel *SL*, 699: "But cognition is itself the concept which is a purpose unto itself and, therefore, through its realization fulfills itself, and precisely in this fulfillment sublates its subjectivity and the presupposed being-in-itself ... Because this idea, as we have shown, is the concept's impulse to realize itself *for itself*; its activity consists in determining the object, and by virtue of this determining to refer itself to itself in it as identical ... for *the idea* is the concept that exists for itself, is that which is absolutely infinite in itself, in which the object is *implicitly* sublated, and the aim is still to sublate it *explicitly*. The object, therefore, is indeed presupposed by the idea of cognition as *existing in itself*; but as so essentially related to the idea that the latter, certain of itself and of the nothingness of this opposition, arrives in the object at the realization of its concept."

which the given is contained.²¹ In the syllogism the subjective purpose of speculation, namely “posit[ing] the object as its own” (Hegel *SL*, 698), is realized by assuming that the object owns an independent essence that requires to be discovered through the universal categories and rules of thinking, what he defines as “the strenuous effort of the Notion” (Hegel *PoS*, 35). By virtue of the syllogism the manifold of perception can be connected and the given can be apprehended as a unity of relations and attributions. In fact, the characteristics of the syllogism is to give a rationale to the plurality of the experience by establishing relations of dependence within the reality and by unitarily apprehending reality. The unity of the experience has been a central issue of Kant’s thinking about the determination of the object and Hegel seems here to confirm the Kantian approach, although he maintains also that determining the object by describing relations of dependence with the syllogism is objective and corresponds to the real essence of reality.

However, what is compelling here is not the fact that Hegel, notoriously, refuses the Kantian distinction between *phenomenon* and *noumenon*, but rather the fact that he maintains that knowledge and truth are characterized by the nature of the thinking subject and its life-form. Whereas other species overcome individuality by means of reproduction, the human species not only reproduces itself, it also develops the universal determination of the object and the reality through knowledge and truth. Knowledge represents a very interesting moment in the Hegelian narration about the negation of external conditioning and otherness’ independence, because it points out that the speculative identity of the subject can be fully realized exclusively by means of truth. There is, in fact, a logical component distinguishing knowledge from life making the former an activity that sublates the externality of the genus and, generally speaking of the living activity, although it also shares with life negative self-reference. The logical advancement of cognition is represented by the fact that it brings the conceptual into an aware form by getting rid of every form of externality, namely of external determination or definition. Whereas a species is defined by means of a concept that is general for its individual members but it also consists in an external definition of a form of life (for example, the form of life of the giraffes is an universal concept because it brings together the individual occurrences of this species but it is also an external definition of a species differing from thousands of other living species), knowledge yields a concept of reality which is free of externality because it is the product of

21 Hegel *SL*, 699: “In the syllogism whereby the subjective idea now rejoins objectivity, the *first premise* is the same form of immediate seizure and connection of the concept with respect to the object as we see in the purposive connection.”

the thinking subject itself. Of course, following Hegel, knowledge is, above all, living activity supplied with self-referred negativity, but it is also the activity in which the concept achieves full inwardness and supplies the thinking subject with an universal definition of reality. Consequently, the speculative identity of the subject is realized by means of truth through which otherness' independence can be mastered by knowing it.

In the previous paragraphs I have addressed two important aspects for understanding Hegel's theory on mind: 1) the substantially similar logical structure it shares with life, namely the absolutely self-referred negativity; 2) the speculative identity as the pivotal characteristic of the self-conscious life. In order to clear the continuity between life and mind we have now to explain how the Idea achieves the aware stage of mind and rationality by developing the structure of absolutely self-referred negativity shared with life.

8

As we already mentioned, addressing the concept means addressing the features of the subject that can bear it, and this is the reason why Hegel names this part of his logics, *Subjective Logic* or *Logic of the Concept*. Indeed, any logic of the concept is the logic of its subject.

The teleological system is, logically considered, very similar to a living system because it is also self-related and this self-relation is based on the negation of external conditionings. However, teleology has residual aspects of externality because it just implies the urge to realize a *limited* final purpose that is still connected to the mechanical world and can be generated by external causes. In other words, the final end does not satisfy the requisites of speculative identity since it represents a finite subjective compulsion while the speculative identity has to be infinite identity of concept and objectivity, namely something beyond subjective stances and pursuits. In fact, speculative identity, as we already mentioned, is a special and practical relationship towards the object that is proper of self-consciousness. This relationship has the character of infinity because the way in which the object can be experienced is potentially infinite. Thus, the self-conscious subject has to be open to this potentially infinite experience, whereas the teleological system is limited to the accomplishment of a finite purpose and does not own any infinite way of tackling subjectivity. The concept needs instead a system bearing infinite self-referentiality, rather than a system based on finite pursuits like the teleological one. Life is, hence, the logical category that we need for explaining the concept as a self-generated notion ruling and coordinating the internal functions of

the living system and establishing an infinite relationship between inner and outer world. The fact that the internal notion is self-generated because it is the result of an act of negation of external conditionings introduces, as we already mentioned, the question of *auto-poiesis*, i.e. self-generation, in life.

According to Hegel a living system is self-generated and self-maintaining so far as it is determined by internal conditions and patterns of agency, but this does not mean that it is generated by an autonomous act of mechanical generation. In fact, self-generation logically excludes the possibility of mechanical self-production, it is rather a conception that points out that the internal functions of the system are inner regulated and maintained and that external conditionings are negated. This does not preclude the possibility that the earth was once devoid of living beings and that life emerged as the effect of an external cause that could have triggered life through the activation of a bio-chemical reaction.²² However, Hegel is not interested in disclosing the origin of life in order to know if living systems generate themselves because his idea of self-generation just stands for the capacity to evolve out of external conditionings and it is not a generation *ex nihilo*. The causation of this capacity itself, namely of the condition for having life, has, therefore, to be attributed to a vital characteristic of the living beings that cannot be further investigated. Hegel's idea on life was the result of a biblical conception of creation and genesis that also excludes the possibility that living species originate from a common ancestor. Nonetheless, his contribution is interesting if we consider the effort to avoid the Kantian skepticism about teleology and final end as an a-priori category. According to Hegel, life and teleology can be handled within a rigorous and systematic philosophical theory if we underline that the inward character of the notion is connected to the self-determined and self-maintaining characteristics of these systems. This is the crucial point that clears why life and mind are strictly related and why life is properly the idea although in an unaware shape. In this enactivist examination of the continuity between mind and life the only aspect that requires to be elucidated is how the idea becomes aware and what this causes.

22 Hegel *PN*, § 339Z: "The production of living being is generally envisaged as a revolution out of chaos, in which vegetable and animal life, organic and inorganic being, were together in a single unity ... There is essentially understanding in nature. The formations of nature are determinate and bounded, and it is as such that they enter into existence. Consequently, even if the Earth was once devoid of living being, and limited to the chemical process etc., as soon as the flash of living being strikes into matter, a determinate and complete formation is present, and emerges fully armed, like Minerva from the brow of Jupiter."

Life turns into self-consciousness as outcome of a process of social integration in which competencies and expertise are shared among members of the same species. Since self-conscious life requires social life Hegel also investigates the natural premises for having social life, which is for him equivalent to spiritual life. He deploys, hence, the notion of *Gattung* (genus or species) in order to introduce a logical category by which the dimension of life activity can be evolved into the dimension of spiritual life. Although biologically speaking, the species is defined by the group of individuals that mate among themselves, in more philosophical terms a genus is a form of life, namely a group of living beings whose life can be understood by means of the same concept. Therefore, the notion of genus has both biological and philosophical consequences. The genus is a notion by which we can universally comprehend the life-form of those individuals belonging to the same practical and biological sphere, and it supplies us with an external description of it. However, this notion of life-form is externally determined unless the life-form itself is able to self-consciously elaborate a self-description. In this case the concept of the genus would be completely internalized and we would conceive of the individuals of that genus as self-conscious and free from external determination.²³ In other words, Hegel in the *Science of Logic* links the feature of self-consciousness to the characteristics of a life-form that is not subject to external description and that sustains a descriptive elaboration of its own form (see also Foot 2001, 27–30).

As we have seen, logics requires to articulate every category of thinking by a logical deduction from the previous category and by explaining the logical role it has within the system. The notion of genus represents, in fact, even in biology the universal determination of a species by providing a general description of the form of life under which individual members can be classified. The logical step described by Hegel from individual life to genus is, hence, the necessary cognitive development of the category of life that does not only account for individual occurrences nor for the simple living process but also for a general description of a form of life. With this category we classify individual living beings and their practical domain under a general description of their form of life that also entails the notion of biological niche. Moreover, by means of the notion of species we establish what is a natural goodness for a living being as an intrinsic and autonomous norm that “depends directly on the relation of

23 Hegel *PoS*, 120: “In thinking, I *am free*, because I am not in an *other*, but remain simply and solely in communion with myself, and the object, which is for me the *essential* being, is in undivided unity my being-for-myself; and my activity in conceptual thinking is a movement within myself.”

an individual to the 'life form' of its species".²⁴ We can, hence, determine the normative domain under which the life activity of every living being has to be understood. As M. Thompson (1995) correctly underlines, even the simple representation of life requires to refer to a *life-form* or species, because a living individual is not just explained by making recourse to the observation of living processes but rather by pointing out that it "falls under a species or 'has' a life-form" (M. Thompson 1995, 242). The merit of M. Thompson's contribution is to highlight that the notion of life cannot be correctly issued by just tackling what he calls natural-historical descriptions such as organism, unity, homeostasis, self-reference, etc. because this would disregard the grammar itself of the notion of life. At the end, a living individual is what abides by the principles we describe by the concept of its own life-form or species to which, of course, some natural-historical judgment might correspond. M. Thompson's approach has the merit to illustrate why the category of *Gattung* is so crucial in the Hegelian conception of life, as it enhances the logical representation we can have of life, which would be incomplete by only conceiving of it as an individual feature. The reason why the chapter on *Life* in the *Science of Logic* issues the notion of species is properly because one would not have any precise representation of the category of life without linking living beings to some form that explains individual belongingness to some concept or ideal of itself. This concludes the process of inwardness that principates with teleology, is accomplished with life and fulfilled with genus [*Gattung*].²⁵ Moreover, it also

24 Foot 2001, 26–27: "By contrast, 'natural' goodness, as I define it, which is attributable only to living things themselves and to their parts, characteristics, and operations, is intrinsically or 'autonomous' goodness in that it depends directly on the relation of an individual to the 'life form' of its species ... My belief is that for all the differences that there are, as we shall see, between the evaluation of plants and animals and their parts and characteristics on the one hand, and the moral evaluation of humans on the other, we shall find that these evaluations share a basic logical structure and status. I want to suggest that moral defect is a form of natural defect not as different as is generally supposed from defect in sub-rational living things. So this is what I shall go on to argue, after a discussion of 'natural goodness' as it is found in sub-rational living things."

25 Of course, the generality of the notion of species also accounts for the enactivist character of life as it explicitly clears the normative and universal shape an individual living being should enact in order to belong to its own genus. See M. Thompson 1995, 241: "We might instead try to explain the concept in something like the following terms: a properly constituted horse is a horse that is as a horse should be (or 'ought to be', or 'is supposed to be') in every respect. Here, though, we should notice, first, that there is every reason to think that we now have an empty concept, and thus that our proposition would come out true whatever we put in the predicate place. Moreover, such an analysis forces us to believe that the quotidian sentences printed in the field guide and voiced over the nature

elucidates the reason why a specific genus has the structure of self-conscious life: this species is aware of its own life-form and, as we will see in Chapter 7 this feature is crucial for understanding human civilization.

However, the chapter on life is just the first step of the logical path necessary to reach the Idea, because “life, or organic nature, is the stage of nature where the concept comes on the scene, but as a blind concept that does not comprehend itself, that is, is not thought; only as self-aware and as thought does it belongs to spirit.” (Hegel *SL*, 517). In order to introduce spiritual life Hegel has to account for both self-determination and the inward nature of the concept, namely by the fact that this form of life should not be affected by externality. In fact, the notion of genus is still affected by externality because it does not imply any self-description and the interaction between individuals of the same species is limited to the exchange of genetic information through mating. Natural species do not have a cultural history because their evolution is biologically determined and is not driven by means of an aware self-description establishing what is good for them. The self-conscious species instead determines by itself what is a good practice and generally speaking what is good for itself by means of an act of freedom and self-determination. As P. Foot (2001) maintains the transition to the rational species is problematic because the characteristic of rationality dramatically changes the practical and normative domain of this species by altering the nature of its goodness. Good for humans becomes something linked to a practical rationality which is the capacity to establish universal forms of agency and practical life. Similarly Hegel conceives of the transition from natural to self-conscious species as something that undermines the primacy of natural external determination and introduces the question of the self-conscious determination of one’s own practical and normative domain. This occurs when the externality proper of genus is sublated into spiritual life where natural bounds are in great part substituted by social bounds and obligations. This is possible because the inward nature of the concept is inherently related to the spiritual and cognitive life and, consequently, the sublation of externality brings to a self-conscious life where what is normatively good can be established in a social and communicative sphere. In the *Science of Logic* the transition from natural genus to spiritual life is explained as a logical shift of categories of thinking and although this method does not account for the linked empirical evolution it has the benefit to point out the logical difference between mere natural species and the self-conscious one,

documentary involve an implicit second order quantification over ‘respects’, which is absurd.”

which is provided by the capacity to determine its own normative and practical domain.

As we previously claimed, the very important difference between natural and self-conscious species is obviously the nature of their socialization, which is determined by biological needs like mating in the former, whereas in the latter we observe a kind of cultural and linguistic interaction. In both cases socialization brings to an evolution and transformation of the species itself and its history, although in the case of natural species this transformation is merely biological because it is based on the exchange of genetic information among individual members by means of the exchange of genes. In the self-conscious species what is exchanged is properly knowledge, expertise, behaviors, values and further cultural evolutive aspects changing the identity of the genus itself.

However, being master of the universal principles of logics and thinking does not only mean that this species evolves knowledge, but also that it determines the universal principles of its own agency and practices out of external conditionings and descriptions. In more empirical terms the human species has a cultural evolution that differently from the natural one is established through social and linguistic rules by which its practical and institutional domain is autonomously shaped and transformed over generations. Hegel's logic represents, therefore, an exceptional contribution in which knowledge, social practices and even human history are explained out of the concatenation of very natural premises like those of life, the living process and the genus highlighting the very biological root of our social practices and cognition as well. The turning point is represented by the logical step in which life turns into self-conscious life becoming aware of the concept inscribed in it and of the normative character of its practices and living activities. The social and practical dimension of self-conscious life turns out to be a normative dimension established by self-conscious life itself independently from natural external necessities and conditioning because of the universal character of self-reflection, which is the capacity to place reality under an order of concepts autonomously yielded. This fact determines a crucial difference with natural species whose normative domain is a biological fact evolved through generations and shaping the living activity of the individual members. Self-conscious life entails what M. Tomasello calls cultural evolution, namely a stratification of uses, habits, practices and institutionalized social activities determining the cognitive, linguistic and practical personal dispositions and representing a further evolution beyond the natural one.

9

The second part of the *Science of Logic* on the *Logic of the Concept*, or *Subjective Logic*, is not merely a book about absolute knowledge and about the all-grasping capacity of logical thinking. It is also a treatise about the logical connection between nature and spirit, life and mind. It maintains a very immanent and anti-transcendental approach to cognition and socialization by highlighting the implicit character of the idea in the biological life. The logical deduction of the category of knowledge and self-conscious activity from the categories of life and genus reveal the differences and similarities between the natural species and the cognitive one. Although this deduction underlines the affinity of the former to the latter, it also stresses the important evolutive step represented by the rational species and its disposition to self-conscious life and cognition. Whereas modern scientists and anthropologists put the focus on the linguistic attitude as the very evolutive gap between our species and the other ones, Hegel regards self-consciousness and freedom as crucial evolutive steps. This approach has many advantages because it relates the issue of self-conscious life to social practices, social integration, human history, laws and institutions. This fosters the understanding of the entire human civilization and form of practices out of natural premises and underlines that the foundation of human civilization rests on immanent and natural conditions and it is not based on transcendental requisites of agency. Human social practices and cognition are instead conceived by Hegel as strictly connected to the material premise of life and the continuity he establishes between living and practical domain aims at naturalizing the human social and cooperative dimension. The advantage of this approach is represented by the possibility to handle nature and spirit, life and cognition in a systematic way, avoiding every sort of dualism and grasping them unitarily and without conflicts or contradictions like in the previous philosophies. This has relevant consequences in our capacity to understand complex phenomena that can appear as opposite or divergent, whereas a more deep investigation can point out that they are related and very similar. The continuity of life and mind highlighted by Hegel in the *Science of Logic*, for instance, enhances our understanding of what cognition is and prevents us from considering mind as heterogeneous to body and nature. This has relevant interdisciplinary aspects because, as we saw, this continuity turns out to be crucial for understanding cognition as a biological and non-computational faculty strictly related to human social practices, history and institutions. Therefore, we can state that Hegel's naturalism in the *Science of*

Logic highlights that the logical categories of thinking can be naturalized and scrutinized in order to enhance our understanding of empirical issues that are also object of investigation of different disciplines like cognitive sciences, biology, neurophysiology, evolutionary psychology and socio-linguistics.

Self-consciousness

1

Self-conscious life is a biological feature that we observe in rational individuals and that dramatically changes the practical and normative domain of their species and, consequently, their form of life: this statement does not really match with the Hegelian lexicon but we will see that there are enough theoretical reasons to believe that Hegel would agree with it. As we saw in the previous chapter, such feature is closely related to the living activity because also in life we observe a normative dimension of agency but as an implicit and unthinking determination of the organic homeostasis of the individual member of each species. Self-consciousness fosters instead awareness about the normative conditions of one's own agency and experience and crucially changes the nature of the living activity into an activity determined in the way of self-consciousness, namely in the way of autonomy and self-determination. In spite of explaining the concrete dimension of needs, desires and social relation, this notion is unfolded by means of a very articulated analysis of logical and relational elements explaining how self-consciousness autonomously sets up a connection with both the object and other subjects. This analysis is highly elaborated and formal because it strives to explain self-consciousness by deploying the role of the concept [*der Begriff*] in the constitution of self-awareness. This makes this part of Hegel's thought one of the most elaborated and articulated; although this issue is also addressed in the *Encyclopedia*, the *Phenomenology of Spirit* represents the work in which the author tries, with high precision, to unfold and inferentially articulate the several outcomes related to the question of self-consciousness. This is the reason why I prefer here to follow the path indicated in this early book rather than that proposed in the *Encyclopedia* that results far more synthetic and less fruitful.

The reason why this notion is so important in Hegel's philosophy depends on the fact that it explains a novel conception of rationality and thinking based on the experience of a living subject facing external objective reality and social interaction. Hegel conceives of this subject as an experiential and relational subject whose identity is shaped by means of the relation it has with the external objective and social surrounding. In contrast to the previous modern conception of subjectivity that maintained that a rational subject is supplied with an innate rational disposition to knowledge, for Hegel human subjectivity is

based on natural features that can be traced back to living dispositions and that are conceived as a relational disposition to establish an autonomous order of principles and concepts about the external reality, roughly defined by Hegel as *otherness* [*Anderssein*]. Such disposition originally is not a cognitive attitude, if we intend for cognition the capacity to elaborate true statements, but rather a natural propensity that Hegel understands as very close to desire and the volitional faculty. Actually, it took some time to him to develop his complete theory about self-consciousness because his investigation was the state-of-art of an investigation about subjectivity, freedom and thinking that involved a great number of thinkers in Germany after the publication of the *Critique of Pure Reason* by Kant. This is also the reason why Hegel addresses this issues already in his early works like the *Jenener Systementwürfe*¹ where he claims the role of self-conscious life in the constitution of social and institutional life. This work is actually very important for understanding Hegel's naturalism since the author here thoroughly investigates those natural compulsions like feeding and mating from which emerges the necessity to set up self-aware forms of social practices like labor and family establishing the normative conditions under which human beings can live together. However, these early works are very approximate when it comes to develop a coherent and systematic theory of self-consciousness, whereas the *Phenomenology of Spirit* represents the work in which the author more consistently and straightforwardly elaborates the notion of self-consciousness by pointing out both its cognitive, relational and social outcomes. This is also true in comparison to the later works where it is less extensively elucidated like the parts of the *Encyclopedia* (*PM*, §§ 424–435). The *Phenomenology of Spirit*, instead, addresses it in-depth and tackles every relevant aspect connected to the autonomous character of self-conscious life like the relation with otherness, self-determination, independence, recognition, social and ethical outcomes. One can state that his theory on self-consciousness represents the kernel of his entire thought that we encounter even in later works like *Science of Logic*, *Philosophy of Right* and *Philosophy of World Human History*. However, whereas the *Science of Logic* just elaborates the logical and inferential frame containing the notions of life and self-conscious life, the *Phenomenology of Spirit* tackles the “effectual concreteness” [my translation for *Wirklichkeit*] of this notion, i.e. the way how it establishes an historical and social environment out of natural pre-requisites. This is maybe the most original side of Hegelian philosophy that generates a

1 Hegel, *Jenener Systementwürfe III*, Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag (1993).

social philosophy as a necessary consequence of the desire related features of subjectivity.

Immanuel Kant already pointed out that reason, namely the capacity to use concepts, is a *Begehrensvermögen*, namely a faculty or power of desiring (Kant *cJ* 65), because it is proper of the pure reason to pursue unconditioned or metaphysical knowledge. According to Kant, this desire is the cause why pure reason becomes metaphysics and strives to unconditioned understanding of reality regardless of the limits of the reason itself. This also explains why he conceived of philosophy as the discipline designed for determining the limits of thought: critical philosophy is what properly contains and governs the spontaneous desire towards absolute knowledge by establishing what cannot be known although it can be thought. For Hegel, instead, desire plays a different role and can be defined as the natural prerequisite of the highest rational activity, namely speculative knowledge. He completely revisits the Kantian conception of speculation by turning thinking into an activity setting up a distinctive correlation to external reality and sublating its independence by grasping it through concepts and categories. According to Hegel, since the absolute can only be understood by means of relations of dependence among its singular moments and occurrences, everything subsists under a condition of dependence to something else. Such dependence is an ontological condition of every moment of the absolute due to its partial and particular characteristic to be just a part or moment of the entire. However, the thinking subject arranges a different relation of dependence with the rest because of its autonomous and self-referring nature what makes it able to develop the conditions of its autonomy and consequently freedom and independence. What makes the subject so different is its rational capacity to articulate and deduce concepts and categories of thinking by which the objective reality can be grasped, and to have a practical rationality by which the normative condition of its agency can be fixed. Hegel does not distinguish the practical from the theoretical rationality at this preliminary stage of analysis because he conceives of self-consciousness as an originally practical disposition of the subject to interact with the external surrounding by virtue of its living natural attitudes. The theoretical element of knowledge comes phenomenologically on the scene in a second phase, when the self-conscious subject makes explicit the categories and principles of its being-there and of its interacting with a knowable object. Philosophy itself properly stands for the investigation of self-consciousness and the social and historical dimension emerging from self-conscious life itself, whereas self-consciousness is just a practical disposition evolved out of life.

Thus, speculation can be conceived as subjective readiness unfolded from the living activity and more specifically from desire, which is a kind of drive

or longing aiming at the appropriation of the desired object by refusing its independence. According to Hegel, cognition is not just propositional or computational thinking based on the representation of reality because this kind of knowledge is schematic and does not account for the dynamical character of the entire. In fact, knowledge is schematic when it just account for the truth or falsehood of a singular statement, downplaying the fact that philosophical knowledge is expected to deal with contradictions and false statements as part of the experience of the entire.² In experiencing the entire the subject discovers that there is no contradiction or falsehood in it because “truth ... includes the negative also, what would be called the false, if it could be regarded as something from which one might abstract” (Hegel *PoS*, 27). In other words, truth is something to be achieved through a self-movement of the concept aiming at the determination of reality. This occurs because it is not just the attribute of a statement, but rather the *activity itself of self-consciousness*. Therefore, it cannot be schematic or formal, namely based on propositional knowledge, because this kind of thinking does not account for the knowing subject as a real and living being, but it just accounts for a computational and abstract method of acquiring information. Following this speculative perspective, truth is not distinct from the knowing subject but it is rather the characteristic itself of the subject-object relation and its method is based on this relationship. Speculative knowledge is the movement itself of the concept, Hegel argues, because it is the activity by which the independence of otherness is refused and sublated, it is namely an act of appropriation of reality which originates from a natural longing of the self-conscious subject. Hence, the only way to appropriately understand what speculation is consist in investigating the subject who bears the speculative activity because speculative truth is based on experiencing the object.

2

We have claimed that self-consciousness is the relational disposition proper of the rational subject to establish a cognitive and practical relation to the object by means of self-reflection, namely by relating everything to itself. This is the primary requisite of speculative knowledge that has not to be conceived

² Hegel *PoS*, 23: “*Dogmatism* as a way of thinking, whether in ordinary knowing or in the study of philosophy, is nothing else but the opinion that the True consists in a proposition which is a fixed result, or which is immediately known ... But the nature of a so-called truth of that kind is different from the nature of philosophical truth.”

as a schematic representation of the object in which the autonomy of the thinking subject is disregarded. Schematic knowledge relies, in fact, on the presumption that truth has to supply us with an adequate representation of the object by means of the principle of correspondence between the mental content and reality. This conception is based on the dualism of scheme and content and assumes that the conceptual scheme should be organized abiding by some neutral content. This approach disregards the fact that any conceptual scheme is autonomously organized by the thinking subject and that the conformity to a neutral object plays a minor role in the development of certainties.

As also Donald Davidson rightly claims, the dualism of conceptual scheme and content “cannot be made intelligible and defensible” because it is based on the idea that there must be an “organizing system and something waiting to be organized” (Davidson 1991, 189) and that any stance should fit the facts in order to be true (Davidson 1991, 193–194). Like Davidson, Hegel opposes this dualism because he also believes that truth is established by virtue of the autonomous evolution of the conceptual, namely by means of the experiential characteristics of subjectivity. Whereas Davidson maintains that truth is a trivial feature of the sentences (like “snow is white” is trivially true for any English speaker), Hegel similarly sustains that the truth is not established by principles or norms that have to be found out of the sphere of the concept. Thus, both contrast any dualism of knowledge by stating that truth is not ruled outside the autonomous and interpretative dimension of the subject. Davidson carries on this project of dissolution of the dualism from the point of view of language and semantics and maintains that subjective certainty is linguistically and socially achieved. Hegel develops instead a very powerful conception of speculation in which self-consciousness is practically able to dismiss the independence of the objective content and to grasp reality through the abstraction of the concept. Nevertheless, their criticism towards the empiricist dualism of scheme and content has many similarities because both underlines the trivial character of the objective content in comparison to the evolution of subject’s certainty.

In Hegel’s thought, speculation represents the frame of subjective understanding by which a cognitive relation towards the object can be established, because everything the subject can comprehend is known by means of its own subjective and cognitive stances. In other words, there is no object we can know that is not known by means of a thinking and subjective disposition, and understanding the act of knowing means dealing with the subject-object relation. Whereas schematic knowledge can be borne by every kind of computational system able to recognize a true statement on the basis of

truth-conditions previously established, Hegel is interested in dealing with a kind of thinking addressing the actual relation any thinking system has with the thought and experienced reality. In fact, whilst the former does not account for the social and historical context in which truth is assessed, the latter explains reality as the result of the subject-object relation itself because it highlights the role of spontaneous and autonomous cognition in shaping the way in which the object is apprehended. This method aims at putting the focus on the nature of subjectivity experiencing the object and at addressing its identity in spite of the manifold and always changing reality. Already Kant in the first *Critique* pinpointed the fundamental role of the transcendental apperception or “I-think” for grasping and understanding the reality by unitarily apprehending it in spite of its plural and diverse nature. Thanks to the “I-think” the experience is consistent with the principle of unitary and coherent knowledge and this underlines that exclusively the subject is in charge of objective knowledge, whereas sensation alone, namely the most receptive faculty, does not grasp the object under concepts and, consequently, in a rational way. Although Kant contribution has been crucial, it has the disadvantage to merely address the conditioned or empirical knowledge, while it undermines the possibility of an universal apprehension of the object through the conceptual faculty. This is the result of the fact that transcendental philosophy conceives of the subject-object relation as something exclusively determined by the subjective conditions while the object as a *noumenon* cannot be disclosed nor even investigated. According to Kant (and Fichte later), the kind of knowledge we obtain from the subject-object relation is just subjective, namely subdued to the subjective conditions of our experiencing the object. This approach entails the main theoretical consequence that knowledge can be indisputable only if the concepts are applied to empirical objects, whilst the understanding of the philosophical questions is bounded to dualism and uncertainty. This occurs if the subject-object relation is intended as a merely subjective relation and the object is left as an independent occurrence that cannot be disclosed in its real essence, i.e. as a *noumenon*.

Hegel seeks instead to attain a kind of subject-object relation that is not merely subjective, but rather *the* objective relationship on which the phenomenological experience of the self-conscious subject is based. Therefore, he has to logically demonstrate that it is possible to overcome the independence of the object by means of the subjective speculative disposition to establish an *objective subject-object relation* and to base speculative knowledge on objective conditions. However, this would only be possible by getting rid of the logical apparatus of transcendental philosophy that conceives of knowledge as a disposition ruled by principles which are independent or transcendental before

the act itself of knowing and experiencing. From the *Differenzschrift* onwards,³ Hegel maintains that the subject is not the bearer of abstract conditions of experiencing reality distinguishing what can be from what cannot be known. He rather claims that the capacity to use and articulate concepts requires a natural subject with a natural disposition to affirm its own autonomy by suspending otherness' independence and placing it under an order of concepts autonomously yielded. As a consequence of this, there cannot be any external border to the conceptual apprehension of reality because every sort of dualism is solved by this self-conscious disposition to know reality by conceptually grasping it. As Hegel states in the *Differenzschrift* the crucial error in both transcendental and empirical philosophies is to consider the subject-object relation as a relation constituted by two entities placed separately by a subjective act.⁴ In fact, although the unity of conscience is a necessary logical requisite, it also implies the subject-object opposition and dualism since the identity of the "I" has as implicit consequence the distinction and separation from a non-I.⁵ The mistake of both empiricism and transcendentalism consists in placing subject and object on two separate levels of epistemological analysis, and in having, as a result, a object-subject relation based on mere subjective conditions. In this kind of relation the object can only be grasped as a subjective content.

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- 3 The so called *Differenzschrift* is the first book published by Hegel when he was a young unpaid professor at the University of Jena. The complete title is *Differenz des Fichteschen und Schellingschen Systems der Philosophie* (*The Difference Between Fichte's and Schelling's Systems of Philosophy*) and it was published in 1801, six years before the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Although the book gives an account of the differences between the two more important philosophical systems (Fichte's and Schelling's) at the time in Germany, it is not correct to define it a commentary. It encloses, in fact, Hegel's very first inquiries about subject-object distinction and introduces several original aspects, so that it can be considered as the commencement of his thought about subjectivity, namely the premise for his future investigation about self-consciousness. Here Hegel does not only defends Schelling's absolute idealism, he also inquires the subject-object distinction and introduces his own personal theory about speculative philosophy that will be extensively deployed in his following works.
 - 4 Hegel *DS*, 127–128: "But precisely what distinguishes Fichte's idealism is that the identity which it establishes is one that does not deny the objective but puts the subjective and the objective in the same rank of reality and certainty; and that pure and empirical consciousness are one. For the sake of the identity of subject and object I posit things outside myself just as surely as I posit myself. The things exist as certainly as I do.—But if the Ego posits things alone or itself alone—just one of the two terms or even both at once but separately—then the Ego will not, in the system, come to be Subject-Object to itself. True, the subjective is Subject-Object, but the objective is not. Hence subject is not equal to object."
 - 5 Hegel *DS*, 127: "The unity of consciousness presupposes a duality, connecting presupposes an oppositeness. Ego = Ego is opposed by an equally absolute proposition: the subject is not the same as the object. Both propositions are of the same rank".

What Hegel instead seeks to attain in the *Differenzschrift* is a conception in which the object is understood as an act of freedom, i.e. as a self-limitation of the subject,⁶ and consequently the reason does not result anymore to be in opposition to nature but as its extension. Therefore, self-consciousness identifies itself as a natural entity and the subject-object opposition turns out to be a natural distinction in which the infinite subjective thinking recognizes itself in the infinite natural and objective conditions as the necessary counterparts of freedom. Self-consciousness is, hence, not constituted as an abstract act of self-identification and self-separation from the object, but rather as a concrete act of reflection about the objective circumstances of its nature and agency. Hegel claims that there is a steady and mutual interdependence and reciprocal limitation between nature and spirit and that spiritual freedom is only possible within this relationship,⁷ namely by reckoning the objective character of nature and life.

The absence of a permanent opposition and the mutual dependence between the “I” and the “non-I” implies several theoretical consequences that impact on the entire Hegelian theoretical reflection, what makes the *Differenzschrift* a crucial text of the entire German classical philosophy. In fact, important philosophical issues like the mind-body relation, the continuity of life and mind, the nature of the conceptual, the logics and even the social dynamics can be understood in the light of this deeply theoretical essay. It points out that the fundamental opposition of subject and object is unsolvable if we keep considering subjectivity as a formal disposition without being constituted by its original relationship to the object. This produces indeed the contrast because it stresses the heterogeneous character of the knowing subject. In other words, the opposition is just the result of the tautological identity of the subject with itself (I=I), while the object is instead integral part of the

6 Hegel *DS*, 130–131: “Philosophical reflection is an act of absolute freedom. It lifts itself out of the sphere of givenness by an act of absolutely free choice [*mit absoluter Willkür*] and produces consciously what, in the empirical consciousness, intelligence produces non-consciously so that it appears to be given ... Self-positing, the identity of subject and object, is free activity ... If, now, the objective world is to be deduced as an act of freedom, this absolute positing of the opposite comes into view as a self-limiting of the Ego by itself.”

7 Hegel *DS*, 139: “In the theoretical respect, nature is .self-limitation intuited, that is to say, it is the objective side of self-limitation. Inasmuch as it is deduced as condition of self-consciousness, and posited in order to explain self-consciousness, nature is simply something that reflection posits for the sake of the explanation, it is a [merely] ideal result. Since self-consciousness is shown to be conditioned by nature, nature is accorded the dignity of an independent standing equal to that of self-consciousness; but its independence is nullified again, because it is only posited by reflection and its fundamental character is oppositeness.”

subjective disposition to conceptually apprehend it because of the continuity we have between the receptive and spontaneous cognitive faculties.

Moreover, this represents the core of speculative identity, which is the development of the modern tautological identity. Whereas the latter is just based on the tautology $I=I$, the former is built through the relation the subject establishes with the object by grasping it and sublating its independence. In Hegel's system otherness is not conceived as incompatible with the tautological identity, but rather it is absorbed by virtue of the identity of the logical categories of the thinking subject, which reflects itself in knowing the object. This identity is speculative because is not built by a formal tautology, but rather by the concrete speculative understanding of oneself in experiencing the object and within the context of this understanding. What Hegel means when he argues that self-consciousness is "the return from *otherness*" [*Rückkehr aus dem Anderssein*] is that self-consciousness is not the motionless tautology "I am I", but rather the conceptual movement by which the otherness of the object is conceived as a mere distinct moment of the unity of consciousness.⁸

3

Speculative identity is proper of self-consciousness and is constituted by the relation it establishes with otherness instead of being bounded to the motionless tautology " $I=I$ ". The identity is originated in the original self-relation of consciousness with itself as it is explained by the principle of the *Cogito*, whereas the speculative side (the innovative part elaborated in German classical philosophy from Kant onwards and completed by Hegel) is what sets up a normative relationship with otherness by placing it under an order of concepts autonomously generated. This is possible because self-consciousness fundamentally refuses and sublates otherness' independence what renders the subject-object relation an unequal and asymmetric connection. This makes of self-consciousness an experiential subject whose character is indissolubly determined by the interaction it establishes with the external world,

8 Hegel *PoS*, 105: "But in point of fact self-consciousness is the reflection out of the being of the world of sense and perception, and is essentially the return from *otherness*. As self-consciousness, it is movement; but since what it distinguishes from itself is *only itself* as itself, the difference, as an otherness, is *immediately superseded* for it; the difference is *not*, and it [self-consciousness] is only the motionless tautology: 'I am I' ... Hence otherness is for it in the form of a *being*, or as a *distinct moment*; but there is also for consciousness the unity of itself with this difference as a *second distinct moment*."

generically called by Hegel otherness, and by the distinctive self-conscious strive towards self-determination and refusal of external conditioning. As we saw in the previous chapter, the reason why Hegel stresses the role of life in order to understand the constitution of self-consciousness is properly related to the primary feature of living organisms that he calls “absolutely self-related negation” of refusing external determination pertaining to the principles of mechanism and physics and of being *causa sui*, namely having an internally determined concept of agency and behavior in the biological environment. This role is also highlighted in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* where he points out the fact that life is a self-developing process in which the otherness is not something separated and independent, but rather something being part of the living process.⁹ Life is conceived by Hegel as a biological whole whose distinct moments are represented by the individual members determining the shape of their species through mating. In life there is hence a fluid and mutually dependent connection between the universal form of living activity (the species) and its particular moments (the individual members) and this is the basis for having the development of the entire biological process. This makes biological life the natural premise of the social and historical dimension in which self-conscious life is constituted, because it is also attained by means of the mutual relationship between the entire process and its particular moments. Life as a phenomenological category of thinking supplies us with the theoretical concept for understanding the relational character of self-conscious life since living activity establishes a peculiar form of interaction with the external surrounding and the other living individual that is not based on the principle of cause-effect, but rather on a self-relational attitude.

Self-consciousness is, hence, constituted by means of self-referentiality which is a living disposition and which defines the behavior of living beings, namely the way of their interaction with similar individuals, individuals of other species and external surrounding. In self-conscious life self-referentiality is fundamentally built on reflection and on the constitution of a context in which self-determination is possible. In the *Phenomenology of Spirit* Hegel explains the phenomenological constitution of self-conscious life from biological life through the category of autonomy which marks the border with the dimension of material needs. What differentiates self-conscious from mere organic life is, in fact, the capacity to autonomously develop a normative regulation of one's own agency out of natural conditioning and on the basis of the interaction with similar self-conscious individuals.

⁹ Hegel *PoS*, 107–108.

What Hegel highlights in his theory of self-consciousness is that independence from material needs is required and necessary because their satisfaction produces a burdensome problem of dependence with the objects of desires. A desire can be satisfied only if the object is at hand and this leads to an idealization to this object, what normally happens in animals that idealize what they strive for—this is the reason why Hegel notoriously states that “animal life is absolute idealism”.¹⁰ Self-conscious beings are instead determined by their eagerness to absolute independence and this is achievable only if their normative homeostasis is shaped on an inferential basis within a space of reasons. Only within this space a desire can be acknowledged in a self-conscious way and as a part of system of goods, whereas outside this ambit a desire and its satisfaction remain merely bounded to animal dimension of dependence and limitation. What originally characterizes Hegel's approach to this issue is the fact that he underlines that the space of reasons is necessarily socially constituted, namely by the participation of similar self-conscious individual. In the phenomenological constitution of self-consciousness, in fact, reason is the result of an interpersonal contention in which the presence itself of an other self-consciousness has a regulative function. As already mentioned, Hegel's scrutiny of reason is based on neither the propositional analysis of language nor of the cognitive stance and their logical foundation, but rather on the investigation of the subjective relation before the object because he conceives of reason as a proactive and reflective attitude towards otherness' independence. Therefore, his method has the advantage to start from a much deeper perspective than the method addressing language as the primary source of thoughts and cognitive contents. Following Hegel, cognitive contents are developed through the pressure exerted by the objective surrounding on the thinking subject which is considered as a practical agent within this content. There is, hence, no subjective theoretical attitude or cognitive matter out of the effectual context in which a living subject establishes a pragmatological relationship and exchange. In this practical domain the presence of an other self-conscious subject is the necessary completion and enhancement, improving

10 *PN*, § 350Z: “True subjective unity exists in the animal therefore; it is an incomposite soul, which contains infinity of form, and is deployed into the externality of the body; what is more, it has a further relation with an inorganic nature, an external world. Nevertheless, animal subjectivity consists of bodily self-preservation in the face of contact with an external world, and of remaining with itself as the universal. As this supreme point of nature animal life is therefore absolute idealism. This implies that it contains the determinateness of its corporeality in a completely fluid manner, and that it has incorporated this immediacy into subjective being, and continues to do so.”

the experiential attitude of self-consciousness and leading to its social involvement. In other words, since the satisfaction of desire does not provide for self-consciousness' autonomy because it is not normatively regulated, the social interaction supplies instead with a rational context in which desires are inferentially acknowledged and rationally experienced.

Since self-conscious experience is ruled by both self-relation and what Hegel calls "return from otherness" [*Rückkehr aus dem Anderssein*],¹¹ the social domain fosters the development of a socially acknowledged normative regulation of the natural dimension of needs by means of recognition. In this way, for self-conscious being the normative homeostasis establishing what is good for a form of life is not something naturally given like in other species, but rather something which is established by means of an inferential articulation of reasons within a social space. Therefore, P. Foot (2001, 27) is quite right in arguing that the principle of goodness is different in the rational species because it is altered by the self-reflective nature of this species and by the disposition of asking and giving reasons. We can also add that the nature of normativity for our species itself is altered by self-reference, which establishes the basis of an ideal of good practice. According to Hegel this ideal is not individuated through a social discourse, but rather through the simple meeting and interaction between self-conscious individuals. In fact, his naturalism is so radical that he conceives of social and interpersonal practices as something emerging from the natural dimension of the species and originating in the biological need for reproduction. Therefore, these practices are not established and designed on the basis of an abstract and propositional reflection, but rather on the basis of a competition or struggle between participants. This struggle represents the social dimension in which the mastery of one member is acknowledged over other participants' competencies. A good practice is, therefore, established on the basis of someone's mastery in specific practical domains, marking the borders between normatively defined practical activities and activities ruled by mere natural needs. The role of the master, who does not feel angst before death, is to emancipate self-conscious practices from natural desires by just being recognized for his or her mastery over fear, namely over a natural drive. The struggle is, therefore, allegoric of a competition between self-conscious individuals for both affirming one's own mastery over a practical context and establishing a set of norms and patterns of agency. This reveals that the confrontation and the definition of a hierarchy are necessary requisites for overcoming the natural dimension of external conditioning and evolving a normative

11 Hegel *PoS*, 105.

domain in which self-determination and freedom are possible, though on the basis of a social authority. Instituting a social authority or a “master” through struggle and recognition, obviously, entails as a consequence a kind of containment of individual independence, although it also represents an improvement in comparison to the dependence created by natural needs because it leads to the integration into a social and normative context. In fact, following Hegel, freedom and independence are only possible within an intersubjective dimension because only this yields normative limitations of one’s own natural drives by introducing the notion of “person” into self-conscious life.

4

Self-consciousness is a cognitive condition of the subject becoming aware of being the ground of its own certainties, knowledge and freedom by virtue of the autonomous character of thinking and agency. According to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, this certainty emerges as a result of the discovery that natural phenomena are understandable by deploying concepts and categories that are not empirically obtained, but rather inferentially and autonomously deduced, like, for example, the concept of force in modern physics. Consciousness discovers, hence, to be unlimited source of grounds and reasons and also to be the core of rational thinking and moral actions. The very premise for self-conscious life is, hence, the negation of empiricism and of the idea that the foundation of knowledge has to be sought “out there” in the ambit of independent reality. The investigation of self-consciousness aims instead at understanding the first singular person as the center and kernel of a disposition based on autonomy, self-mastery and refusal of external conditioning. Therefore, the self-conscious subject understands itself as the primary source of independence because it negates external determinations and it seeks its own identity by returning to itself from the experienced otherness. This “conceptual movement” as it is called by Hegel [*Bewegung des Begrifflichen*] defines the experiential character of self-consciousness, which is connected to the external surrounding by preserving its own autonomy. The Hegelian phenomenological description of self-consciousness’ constitution highlights its dialectical character of both being related to the external reality and striving to be independent, namely not to be “in an *other*” (Hegel *PoS*, 120).

The constitution of self-consciousness is not a tautological matter like the Cartesian *Cogito* because is not merely based on the simple evaluation that the capacity to bear mental contents entails the existence of a thinking subject, namely of something able to generate cognitive stances. Descartes’ account

of subjectivity is formally correct because it is based on the assumption that any mental stance is supposed to depend on an autonomous “system” bearing cognitive contents. In other words, a cognitive content cannot independently exist without the activity of some system or subject committed to abide by the principles of logics and rational argumentation. This makes of the Cartesian subject the entity in charge of thought and ideas, and responsible for a reliable thinking activity. However, this subject is conceived as isolated from the external surrounding and as only establishing a relation with itself. Therefore, the truth of the *Cogito ergo sum* does not supply us with a sufficient foundation of knowledge because it does not explain the kind of relationship the thinking subject has with the objective reality. The object is rather conceived by Descartes and many philosophers after him as an exogenous substance compared to that of thought, namely a substance with which subjectivity is at odd. The reason of Cartesian skepticism regarding knowledge lays on the assumption that thinking is an activity abiding by different principles than those ruling reality. After Descartes, empiricism highlighted the fact that knowledge can only be based on empirical facts because of their objective nature, but this approach could not explain how concepts can be successfully applied to observational data. The huge mistake by empiricism is represented by the presumption that knowledge is just a question of gathering information from the external surrounding and that concepts are those we acquire from empirical observation. However, knowledge is based on concepts and principles that cannot be discovered by any empirical observation because of their universal character. These principles are instead the result of the autonomous inferential articulation and deduction of categories by which they can be applied in order to understand the empirical information. Whereas the problem with Descartes is the conception of a subjectivity isolated in the tautological truth of the *Cogito*, the main problem with the empiricism is its fallacy in considering the mere empirical data as the only element form which we obtain certain knowledge. Kant went beyond the rationalism-empiricism opposition by conceiving of knowledge as the result of the cooperation between the receptivity of sensations and the spontaneity of reason and by explaining the deployment of the categories for understanding empirical facts. For many regards, Hegel follows the Kantian methodology to get rid of the empiricism by pointing out the role of the conceptual in the experience, but he also improves the relevance of self-consciousness. In fact, he highlights that self-consciousness is fundamentally constituted by means of the relation it establishes with the external reality and by means of its disposition to sublimate otherness’ independence. In other words, whereas for Descartes and also Kant the external reality remains an exogenous substance compared to thinking, for Hegel thinking is

the activity of assimilating reality's independence by conceptually grasping it. Hegel's point is to indicate that self-consciousness' identity is not tautologically constituted, but rather organized by means of the link it develops with the external surrounding. Whereas the tautological identity does not account for the manifold character of the self-conscious experiential disposition and only handles subjectivity as an ineffectual substance, Hegel underlines that the identity of self-consciousness is not independent from the the association it has with the object. On the contrary, the real and concrete identity of subjectivity originates from its disposition to set up a connection to the external reality, and within the ambit of such relation its identity has to be taken into account.

This represents an important achievement of Hegelian philosophy because it introduces a very innovative conception of subjectivity getting rid of the burdensome issues of modern philosophies. Self-consciousness is conceived as a relational property establishing a relation with the external surrounding out of its autonomous character, striving towards independence and freedom. For this reason the primary characteristics of self-consciousness is the speculative identity that we can define as the identity evolved through the relationship the subject sets up with the external surrounding. In contrast to the tautological identity, the speculative one is evolved out of the nature of the subject of having a spontaneous and cognitive disposition towards the object and the subjective outcomes that originate from this subject-object relation like the social, linguistic and cognitive behaviors can be considered as shaping self-conscious life. In other words, self-consciousness is not a static subjective condition, it is rather an experiential and relational disposition whose identity is represented by the history of its own connecting and experiencing. Consequently, subjective stances like knowledge, language skills, habits, moral evaluation and social roles represent its constitutive and determining elements. The aware and reflective competencies, like the cognitive, linguistic and social ones, are, in fact, possible because of the self-relating nature of personal certainty. Aware self-reflection, i.e. self-consciousness, is the fundamental requisite for experiencing empirical facts by which the subject gains an aware representation of reality. When a living subject attains a representation of reality which is not bounded to natural needs or instincts, but which is rather evolved by means of universal principles of understanding and definition, we can talk of knowledge. It is in fact part of the self-consciousness' eagerness not "to be in an *other*", namely to be free, because it provides the universal apprehension of otherness by means of universal categories and concepts. The act of grasping something is common to the natural drives and instincts, although these are determined by particular conditions and needs of the subject bearing them, they are, in

other words, still affected by particularity. A cognitive stance is indeed also an act towards the object aiming at its apprehension, however it can be borne by any rational subject. This renders cognition an universal attitude whose outcomes like ideas, concepts, categories and knowledge can be potentially shared with individual having the same disposition. The natural drive remains instead with its own bearer, which is also confined to the instinct itself.

Knowledge represents instead an act of freedom and emancipation because of its universal nature. The reason why humans have knowledge whereas animals' experience is limited to particular gains, is properly because of this eagerness that requires emancipation from particularity and access to the universal representation of reality. Hegel surely disregards many epistemological aspects connected to knowledge because he conceives of it as the result of the speculative identity of the subject, rather than as the outcome of a correct methodology of verification. Truth is for him the result of a correct subject-object relationship that cannot be conceived as independent from the constitution of a self-conscious subject and its conceptual disposition. His conception of truth is intuitive and not based on the epistemological problem about what makes a statement true and adequate to represent external reality. Hegel is much more interested in investigating thought as expression of the first singular person and as reflex of the real essence of subjectivity. In other words, his theory of self-consciousness implies that every activity of a self-conscious subject is actually self-investigation, namely the confirmation that everything can be connected to the cognitive disposition itself. Knowledge is, therefore, the outcome of the free and autonomous attitude to inferentially articulate concepts and to place reality under an order of conceptualization autonomously generated. The epistemological problem of understanding how the propositional content of a statement can be consistent with the exogenous substance of the facts can be, consequently, overcome because truth is not a question of correspondence, but rather of satisfaction of requisites of personal autonomy. In this way, the empiricists presumption about the primacy of the facts over thinking vanishes before the Hegelian idea that knowledge is the result of an act of freedom by the concept and by the capacity to supersede the independence of reality. This avoids the burdensome question about the different ontological constitution of cognition and reality that has been the focus of modern philosophy and even of some contemporary epistemology, and points out that knowledge is due to the cooperation between the spontaneity of reason and receptivity of perception. For many regards, Hegel follows Kant's idea about cognition because he endorses the deduction of the categories in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. However, as McDowell (1994) highlights, according to Hegel the conceptual has no external border and the very philosophical question about

objectivity can be answered by means of its systematic philosophy. Hegel's theory of knowledge is practically a Kantian thought that, unlike Kant, refuses the dogma of the *thing-in-itself* and conceives of the conceptual as an *all-grasping speculative tool*. I have already highlighted that this conception has been possible because of the Hegelian revision of the transcendental apperception in the first *Critique*, what completely changes the idea about self-conscious autonomy. Whereas for Kant the use of concepts is limited to experiencing empirical facts, for Hegel it spreads over to every kind of practical, concrete and social ambit of self-conscious life. A very important aspect of this approach is represented by the fact that epistemology and the problem about knowledge are conceived as issues concerning the self-conscious subject, rather than as connected to a general problem of method: every investigation about cognition and mind does not just tell us how truth is achievable, it clears rather the features and conditions of self-conscious life itself.

5

In the *Phenomenology of Spirit* sociality plays a crucial role for the constitution of self-consciousness in spite of its negative and self-relating nature. How is it possible that a subjective disposition so radically originated from independence and negation of external conditioning is shaped and structurally determined by social integration and interpersonal relations? In a very famous passage of the *Phenomenology* Hegel states that mind [*Geist*] is "I that is We and We that is I" (Hegel *PoS*, 110) and that this can be achieved by means of recognitive relationships. In order to understand this relational phenomenon we have to acknowledge that mind or spirit [*Geist*] is an extended or universal mental and moral disposition and not just a personal and individual condition. Hegel does not use the adjective extended which has been introduced by contemporary philosophy in order to explain the notion of extended or common mind (for example: Pettit 1996), a sort of intersubjective and universal awareness shaping individual behaviors and certainties. His notion of spirit is explained by its universal character that transcends the particular and individual forms of self-conscious life. In other words, individual self-consciousness cannot be constituted through an individual experiencing and reflecting because it would be affected by particularity. On the contrary, social experience supplies it with the possibility to define goodness for itself in an extended and cooperative way and by establishing a practical context. The notion itself of mastery has to be understood as mastery within a practical context, rather than as a question of power over other individuals. Validating a mastership is the result of being

recognized as competent in specific practices and being accepted as an individual having authority over a practical ambit (Brandom 2002). This means that the struggle for recognition is not just a question about deciding who has a power over someone else, but rather a question of developing a practical and social context in which someone is awarded the authority to exert some leading role. This creates a social and cooperative context in which everyone's participation is ruled by means of acknowledged principles and capacities. Although the struggle implies some sort of competition between individuals, the fact of being recognized unfolds a dimension in which every participant is given a role what shapes shared practices. The fact that Hegel accounts for what he calls "struggle over fear of death" points out that he intends to address a primordial and natural fear that can be sublated in the social ambit in which natural principles are substituted by social universal norms such as bravery and courage. This highlights the supervenient character of sociality over nature and the fact that social and self-conscious life are supposed to interface with the natural requisites determining life within a practical and social domain. Sociality is, therefore, at the crossroad of life and self-conscious life because personal interaction fosters a shared practical dimension that, unlike the natural one, becomes effective by means of norms which are socially established as an act of aware freedom. Clearly, the constitution of norms foresees the possibility that someone has more authority than others over this normative context, someone who can be seen as having a sort of mastery over shared practices. However, the asymmetrical outcome of the struggle for recognition deciding who is the "master" and who is the "bondsman" should not push to think that Hegel intends to address here a mere question of power and enslavement. He rather wants to highlight that every social practice requires a sublation of natural particularities and the acknowledgment of social and universal principles of action and goodness. His naturalism is so radical in this point that he does not conceive of practices as something originating from reason or from a reflection about human goodness because this would imply to apply an abstract idea of reason introduced without having been previously explained. He prefers to consider human practices as originating from the earliest disposition of self-conscious individuals to coordinate and create jointly a normative dimension of social activities from which the idea of good practice becomes explicit. Moreover, the idea itself of *Geist* is attained within the practical dimension as the result of a reflection about the social and committal nature of the practices. We would not have a mind without acknowledging the inferential character of the norms and rules underlying and determining life in a self-reflective way. Being self-conscious means, hence, evaluating and acquiring general principles of acting and thinking that deliver commitments

and rules in forms of universal norms of agency that can be shared with similar individuals.

Geist is the German name for both mind and spirit and in spite of the most common translation of “spirit” it is possible that Hegel just meant “mind” or “common mind” with this word. It can be defined, hence, as the collective awareness about interpersonal and normative social contexts constituted by the individual struggle for recognition of one’s own authority over a practical ambit. The definition of *Geist* as “I that is We and We that is I” points out two important self-evident aspects: *first*, mind can only be explained by making recourse to the first person (both singular and plural), and *second*, it can be explained as a fact established by means of a relation between unity and plurality. That mind is bounded to the first person is already implicit in the fact that a mindful disposition does not foresee an external independent thought, or an independent order of norms and principles. Every normative order can be understood and disclosed by mind because a norm is a cognitive fact and, therefore, it is a matter of the first person. The second aspect that mind is constituted through a relation between unity and plurality is the result of the assessment that a norm is not independent from a social context, namely from a dimension in which a norm can be evaluated as good or bad. Because of the presumption that humans create good practices for their own benefits, a practice can only be scrutinized and assessed in a social and shared dimension, whereas the individual action is independent from the normative issue unless it implies a social relevance or interest. The Hegelian account for mind represents, hence, a complex approach to a matter that cannot be reduced to the analysis of cognitive stance of singular individuals. Any normative content cannot be solipsistically evaluated because this would jeopardize the relational and recognitive nature of human beings that define the goodness for their own form of life in terms of goodness for the entire species [*Gattung*]. As also M. Thompson claims (2008) the shared character of the human social practices originates from the very natural relation between individuals and their species that is evolved in terms of deciding what is good for the human species by establishing a normative dimension. The struggle for recognition is subjected to the same normative principle that a practice is not an occasional activity, but rather an activity disciplined by its own participants through principles universally acknowledged. This clears why mind or *Geist* are constituted by means of a special relation between individuals disposition and collective agreement or belongingness, because it points out the necessity for individual disposition to relate with an ambit of social recognition and evaluation. Moreover, this highlights the important fact that self-consciousness and mind are two very different notions. Whereas self-consciousness is bounded to the

first singular person, mind is a common shared faculty evolved by means of social interaction between two or more individuals. Of course, mind does not exist independently from individual human beings nor out of their cognitive capacities, however it is fully explicated by the interpersonal relation and the practical context in which those individuals live. This explains the fact that mind is “I that is We, and We that is I” and the fact that it needs a dialogical and practical ambit in which the normative element of self-conscious life can be collectively determined.

6

Hegelian theory about mind, spirit and self-consciousness is properly a theory about normativity and social practices because of his pragmatic conception concerning the acquisition of cognitive disposition. This originates from the philosophical effort by German philosophers after Kant to attain a systematic comprehension of both the theoretical and practical competencies by overcoming the schematic treatise of the first two *Critiques* and by handling them in a more organic way. Already Fichte points out that the moral requisites are fundamental for achieving freedom and for knowing the unconditioned nature of subjectivity. The result is that the Hegelian thought about mind is an original union of both practical and theoretical analysis of self-consciousness, which is conceived as a more practical than theoretical attitude. This attitude builds a normative and practical context in which self-conscious life's liberty can be guaranteed and enhanced. However, the constitution of this context is not casual because it has to be strictly connected to the self-determining and autonomous characteristic of self-consciousness that conceives of itself as an activity of self-legislation [*Selbstgesetzgebung*]. In other words, self-consciousness negates any independent order of norms affecting its own independence and autonomy and conceive of laws as a necessary complement and enhancement for its freedom. In order to explain the necessary connection between norms and freedom Hegel links the development of norms to self-consciousness and to the constitution of a self-aware and free agency out of natural premises. In fact, self-consciousness is characterized by autonomy and independence from external conditioning and this determines the necessity for social interaction and satisfaction through recognition. Why does Hegel claims that natural needs change into social recognition in order to satisfy the autonomous nature of self-conscious life? Why does he maintain in the same chapter of the *Phenomenology* that “self-consciousness is Desire” (Hegel PoS, 109) and in the following page that “self-consciousness achieves its satisfaction

only in another self-consciousness" (Hegel *Pos*, 110)? The answer is that the satisfaction of natural needs causes solitary dependence on the object of desire, and this makes this object the major normative issue for animal life. Animal life's normativity and behavior is indeed determined by the satisfaction of material needs and this renders it externally determined, namely determined by the major issue of satisfying a desire by means of the appropriation of an external object. Self-conscious life's normativity is instead constituted by negating any external determination, whilst socialization and recognition represent the possibility to collectively acknowledging desires by being aware of their normative character.

This aspect of Hegel's naturalism is quite elaborated because it concerns the role of nature and natural needs in shaping our normative dimension and self-conscious life. A complete sublation of material needs would be impossible because of the living nature of self-consciousness and because they also play a normative role since they require to be satisfied. Nonetheless, animal life's normativity, as we saw, is exclusively determined by material needs determining what is good for the homeostasis (the network of organic function necessary for the goodness of an organism) of an individual animal.¹² Goodness for an animal is the satisfaction of its needs and the preservation of the integrity of its biological functions by means of the living activity consistent with the form of life of its species. Self-conscious life instead acknowledges its demands as integral part of its own goodness, by having awareness of their normative character and by including them into a wider discourse about good life and good practices. If we consider the Aristotelian virtues, they are principles that just balance our life by establishing what is a good life for our species and not just for an individual. Desires are not, hence, experienced as a part of a lonely existence and life, but as something that can be mastered for defining what is a good practice in general. According to Hegel, the question is not about determining ethical principles like virtues and values, but rather about assuring independence to self-conscious existence, namely indifference before external conditionings. In this sense, social interaction fosters the capacity to sublimate

12 In this regard, it is worth noting Hegel's early text which was published posthumously during the twentieth century with the title *Jenear Systementwürfe III* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1993). Here the author dwells at length on the relationship between natural needs and the institutionalization of human practices, seeing in this the premise for the establishment of a self-conscious and free life on the basis of intersubjectivity and recognition. This work presents some very compelling insights linked to Hegel's naturalism, although it lacks the same and elaborate analysis of the relational and normative conditions that we reckon in the *Phenomenology of the Spirit*.

the otherness created by desire by virtue of the regulative function ensured by the relation with other self-conscious individuals.¹³ The presence itself of another self-consciousness requires to overcome this ambiguity by establishing a normative dimension in which one's authority and mastery can be acknowledged. The normative for Hegel is hence determined by two fundamental conditions: first, the demand for freedom and independence; secondly, having social interaction. In this way any legislation of norms is regulated by the principle of having a good practice, which becomes universal because it is socially chosen. Like the genus in biological life develops a relation between individual life and universal form of life, social interaction in self-conscious life develops an aware concept of good practical life by relating individual demands to social requirements and recognition. Therefore, the normative is determined by relating the particular needs of self-conscious life to the universal requisites of good practice. In this way, Hegel links the element of life to the element of practice with an analysis that is very similar to the more recent one by M. Thompson (2008) because both highlight that action and practices are a specific form of life process by which the characteristics of subjectivity and sociality are disclosed.¹⁴

The notion of self-consciousness is crucial within Hegel's philosophical system and entails a very elaborated inferential analysis of its fundamental requisites such as desire—its natural premise—independence, autonomy, recognition, associate life, etc. It can be regarded as the explanation of the elementary structure of the self and speculative identity and the core of his entire

13 Hegel *PoS*, 111: "Self-consciousness is faced by another self-consciousness; it has come *out of itself*. This has twofold significance: first, it has lost itself, for it finds itself an *other* being; secondly, in doing so it has superseded the other, for it does not see the other as an essential being, but in the other sees its own self. It must supersede this otherness of itself"

14 M. Thompson 2008, 27–28: "But action in this sense is a specific form of *life process*, as we may say, and a proper comprehension of it will surely rest on seeing it as coming under the latter category, and thus on an elucidation of the wider category itself (the beginning of such an elucidation is attempted in the following chapters). *Will* we may call the capacity to be the subject of life processes of that more determinate type; *practical reason* is the inevitably concomitant capacity for one's thoughts to bear suitably on *such* life processes. It is moreover natural to think that these interwoven powers, like the capacity to perceive, can only belong to an individual thing, the agent, as the bearer of a specific *life-form*—or, as we might say, according to its 'species'. Thus it seems that an elaboration of the nature of action and agency will at the same time be the elaboration of a certain turn that determinate life-forms can take—namely, where they are determinate forms of rational life, such as the specifically *human* form, a phenomenon of terrestrial evolutionary history, is forever being said by its bearers to be."

thought as every aspect of spiritual, social and historical life eventually traces back to the conditions of self-consciousness. In fact, even the social struggle for recognition and the economical question of goods production are tackled here, even though without any reference to human history. Methodologically speaking, self-consciousness represents the fundamental and elementary structure of subject-object distinction and of the relationship to otherness—and to other individuals—and it is unfolded through a formal analysis of its own concept. The natural side of this analysis is represented by desire and natural needs, which amount to the compulsory element that shall be governed by the autonomous act of reflection and socialization. This makes this inquire independent from any empirical observation and very alike to the logical inquire about life and the Idea that we addressed in the first chapter. However, Hegel's investigation about spirit is very articulated and does not disregard the necessity to focus on the biological organism and the relation between perception and habits, what contains more observational factors. In the next chapter we will abandon the formal analysis of the concept and self-conscious life and we will see Hegel's theory of biological functions and their relation to habits and behaviors, which characterizes another important step necessary for the clearing up the interdependence of spirit and nature.

The Hegelian Theory about the (Human) Biological Organism

1

Hegel tackles the partially empirical issue about the biological organism in his *Encyclopedia of Philosophical Sciences* and particularly in the last part of the *Philosophy of Nature* and in the first part of the *Philosophy of the Subjective Spirit*. The reason of this split is due to the fact that animal life cannot be identified with subjective spirit although it is strongly related because human beings are, of course, biological organisms. Hegel maintains that the emergence of mindful dispositions such as habits, language and cognition is naturalistically related to the soul that we share with the other animals although human soul reveals distinctive characteristics. Explaining soul means, therefore, explaining a disposition proper of the animal kingdom (the word animal comes from the Latin *anima* that means soul), although the human one is determined by the acquisition of habits and uses that are socially acknowledged. These pages of the *Encyclopedia* can be regarded as the parts in his entire production in which Hegel more explicitly defends a naturalistic approach towards mindful activities. In fact, not only animal life can be unfolded in terms of self-sufficiency and autonomy, also subjective spirit has to be cleared as emerging from the natural perceptive faculty through a process of acculturation and social integration. In this exposition Hegel follows the same structure of the *Science of Logic* in which, as we have previously seen, life represents the category introducing the absolute Idea because it “is the stage of nature where the concept comes on the scene, but as a blind concept that does not comprehend itself, that is, is not thought; only as a self-aware and as thought it belongs to spirit”.¹ This enhances our understanding that Hegel's theory of mind, agency and social practices is radically determined by an approach placing nature, life and animal life as necessary requisites and basis for having self-conscious life, being the latter the reflective and aware replication of the formers. The reason why these paragraphs of the *Encyclopedia* differ from the *Science of Logic* is due to the different subject of analysis, namely the logical categories of apprehending reality in

¹ Hegel *SL*, 517.

the latter and the cognitive dispositions of the conscious subject in the former. The conscious subject is supposed to be a real entity, whereas the concept is just the abstract and logical transfiguration of spiritual life.

The method of investigation in the *Encyclopedia* is, thus, a mix of empirical observations about the perceptive faculty and of formal analysis of philosophical issues, *in primis* the mind-body relationship, as it is based on those elements characterizing self-conscious subjectivity and marking the difference with animal life. We are, therefore, leaving the logical investigation that characterized the previous chapters about life, cognition and self-consciousness and we are commencing a phase in which Hegel's philosophy tackles concrete issues concerning spiritual life. Since subjective spirit is not else than the subjective and individual expression of the more general human spiritual or self-conscious living activity, this part of Hegel's philosophy has the advantage to put the focus on the relation between life and mind (or biology and cognitive disposition) as features of real individual subjects and to investigate them as characteristics jointly present in the same living entity. This makes possible to accurately investigate the different forms of self-conscious life and their relation to the biological substratum in a very empirical and observational way and independently from the inferential connection we establish between them from a logical perspective. In other words, the methodology here changes significantly and this enriches Hegel's naturalistic approach by providing an accurate exposition of the mutual dependence of animal and spiritual life.

2

In order to understand the relation between animal and self-conscious life we have to acknowledge the significant logical aspect of the Hegelian theory of subjectivity that a living subject is characterized by infinite self-reference,² namely by the steady reproduction of the concept of itself. This point is highlighted in both the *Science of Logic* and in the *Encyclopedia* and represents the

2 Hegel *SL*, 678- 679: "Life, considered now more closely in its idea, is in and for itself absolute *universality*; the objectivity which it possesses is throughout permeated by the concept, and this concept alone it has as substance. Whatever is distinguished as part, or by some otherwise external reflection, has the whole concept within it; the concept is the soul *omnipresent* in it, a soul which is simple self-reference and remains one in the manifoldness that accrues to the objective being ... The infinite reference of the concept to itself is as negativity a self-determining, the diremption of itself within itself *as subjective singularity and itself as indifferent universality*."

mark of the living, namely a system aiming at preserving and developing its own internal and normative network of functions. This self-referring system can only originate in an organic living individuality because only a biological organism has the property of self-reference aimed at maintaining the internal and normative network of its own functions. I conceive of this network as normative because it establishes what is good for a living organism by indicating the *right shape*³ of biological functions and the appropriate correlation of their internal activities. There is, hence, a biological and naturalistic constitution of the Self, which is based on a self-referential system of operational living activities and on their internal coordination naturalistically defining what is good for this system. This represents the core of the Hegelian conception of speculative identity because it affirms both the unity of the manifold functions within an organism (identity) and the fact that they develop a special and autonomous relation with the surroundings (speculative). In other words, they are not just identical to a specific concept of a life-form, they are also functional in determining the agency and the normative disposition towards the environment. Hegel's biology is characterized by the effort to explain the function as teleologically emerging from the need to establish a unity of functions perfectly shaped to fit the environment and to cause the satisfactory interaction with the external reality, which the living organism is expected to have. Therefore, the organic unity of the animal is "*negative* return to itself from external relationship" (Hegel *PN*, § 353), namely the capacity to maintain itself identical to a given set of functions by marking the difference with the external world. Hegel pinpoints that the major feature of animal life is maintaining its identity by delimitating itself from the surrounding and by preserving "itself in this relationship with that which is external to it" (Hegel *PN*, § 352 *ad.*). This kind of relationship is based on the surplus of functionality we observe in living organisms that we explain in terms of homeostasis: if one considers things like nutrition, breathing, drinking, etc., one observes biological functions that are structured by means of a relationship with the outer world, but that are also necessary for the existence of the organism itself. As we already argued, Varela, Maturana and E. Thompson⁴ call this "the mark of the living" and define it as

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- 3 Hegel *PN*, § 353: "Shape is the animal subject, as a whole which is related only to itself. The developed determinations of the Notion exist in the subject, and are displayed there by this whole. Within subjectivity these determinations in themselves are concrete, although they constitute the simple elements of this subjectivity."
- 4 E. Thompson 2007, 152–158: "Life is thus a self-affirming process that brings forth or enacts its own identity and makes sense of the world from the perspective of that identity. The organism's "concern," its "natural purpose," is to keep on going, to continue living, to affirm and reaffirm itself in the face of imminent not-being. Incessant material turnover and exchange

surplus of significance because these organic biochemical functions establish a way to bring forth the self-affirming identity of the organism itself.

Hegel points out that the special relation animal life has with the surroundings also represents the pre-condition for having sensibility, awareness about the environment and capacity to make decisions and to have a behavior. This is possible because the unity of animal life is its own notion or concept determining a sphere of autonomy and independence from the external conditions and limitations. The sensitive faculty is developed as integral part of the unique relationship the animal has with the surroundings, which is aimed at sustaining the integrity of the internal design of biological functions constituting the notion of the animal itself.⁵ The kind of interaction the animal has with the external environment is based, hence, on an internal formal unity constituting its identity and that can only be maintained by establishing a self-distinction from the rest (what we previously pinpointed as *speculative identity*).

However, unlike the human one, animal speculative exertion is not cognitive (it does not produce statements nor knowledge), it is just an *enactive* power of realizing and bringing forth the unitary network of its functions by

with the environment is both a reason for this concern and the only way to meet it ... In establishing a pole of internal identity in relation to the environment, the autopoietic process brings forth, in the same stroke, what counts as other, the organism's world. To exist as an individual means not simply to be numerically distinct from other things but to be a self-pole in a dynamic relationship with alterity, with what is other, with the world. This kind of relationship is not possible for non-autonomous entities. Without organizational and operational closure—without, in other words, any circular and self-referential process whose primary effect is its own production—there is no identity-producing mechanism. Hence there is no dynamic co-emergence of an individual and environment ... That sucrose is a nutrient is not intrinsic to the status of the sucrose molecule; it is, rather, a relational feature, linked to the bacterium's metabolism. Sucrose has significance or value as food, but only in the milieu that the organism itself brings into existence. Varela, as we have seen, summarizes this idea by saying that thanks to the organism's autonomy, its environment or niche has a "surplus of significance" compared with the physicochemical world. Living is a process of sense-making, of bringing forth significance and value. In this way, the environment becomes a place of valence, of attraction and repulsion, approach or escape."

- 5 Hegel *PN*, § 351 *ad.*: "In the animal the self is for the self, and the immediate consequence of this is that the *differentia specifica* or absolute distinguishing feature of the animal, is the completely universal element of its subjectivity, the determination of sensation. The animal's self is of an ideal nature, it is not effused and immersed in materiality, but is merely active and present within it. At the same time however, it finds itself within itself. This ideality, which constitutes sensation, also constitutes the supreme bounty of nature's existence, for everything is included within it. It is true that joy and pain etc. also form themselves corporally, but the whole of their bodily existence is still distinct from the simple being-for-self of the existence into which they are taken back as feeling."

setting up a functional relation towards the surrounding (breathing, nutrition, sheltering, etc.) without being determined by external conditionings. Such effort is normative because it determines those actions and behaviors that are necessary for complying the conditions of good life. The normative of the living organism is, hence, something related to its capacity to fulfill the ideal conditions of good existence indicated by the universal concept of its own life-form. In life there is, indeed, a strong idealistic connotation which is satisfied by virtue of the living effort of preserving the integrity of the internal network of functions what is fundamental for the existence itself. Hegel highlights that this preservation occurs in spite of the necessary relation the organism has with the surroundings and points out that this is possible because living processes are totally different from mechanical or physical ones. In fact, the operational integrity of the biological organism is prevented from dissolving into the mechanical dimension of the relation of cause and effect thank to the unitary and self-referential character of animal life. The reason of Hegel's claim that "animal life is absolute idealism"⁶ is based on the assumption that in the animal we observe the individual living effort to maintain the network of functions unitarily described by a normative principle establishing what is a good shape for that individual. There is, hence, a notion or concept of what is good life for that individual, which determines its behavioral patterns and agency.

3

The living subject is a practical and behavioral entity characterized by the relationship it has with the external environment. Hegel extensively puts the focus on the kind of relation the animal has with the surroundings because it underlines the difference between the living process and any other physical or chemical process. In fact, mere natural phenomena are characterized by a peer system of effects causation in which no subjectivity is involved. Animal life entails instead a subject that distinguishes itself from the external world and understands it as the negation of its own subjectivity. This negation is what fosters a practical relationship that the animal sets up with the external world

6 Hegel *PN*, § 350 *ad.*: "True subjective unity exists in the animal therefore; it is an incomposite soul, which contains infinity of form, and is deployed into the externality of the body; what is more, it has a further relation with an inorganic nature, an external world. Nevertheless, animal subjectivity consists of bodily self-preservation in the face of contact with an external world, and of remaining with itself as the universal. As this supreme point of nature, animal life is therefore absolute idealism."

what causes the distinction between a self-related subject and a mere object.⁷ The establishment itself of a practical relationship towards the surrounding is, hence, the logical consequence of being a self and of having feelings.

The perceptual system of the animal and the linked instinct to preserve itself by satisfying desires and needs is what places it in a practical dimension within the objective world and what causes a practical subsistence. The necessity to preserve the internal biological homeostasis, which has, like we saw, a normative connotation, is what makes animal behavior distinctive in terms of refusal of external conditionings and interference. The practical dimension of animal subjectivity, i.e. the animal agency, is possible because of naturalistically supervenient requisites of life establishing a *surplus of significance* (E. Thompson 2007, 152–158) over the environment by relating everything to organism's sensations and needs. This practical dimension is based on the subject-object relation⁸ and it is moulded by subjectivity itself.

A stone, for instance, is not a stone *for itself*; it is just a stone *in itself* without any reversing or reflective component of its idea or thought. Although the animal does not think nor articulate concepts, its behavior is typified by self-relation, namely by relating the objective context to itself, and this renders the object something having value for the self of the animal. The plant, the water, the shelter, the cold, etc. are not only elements in themselves of the environment, they are also relevant elements for the Self of the animal, namely elements of its practical sphere.⁹ Placing a living entity in the objective

7 Hegel *PN*, § 359: “*The process which is of a real nature*, or the practical relationship with inorganic nature, begins with the self’s internal diremption, the awareness of externality as the *negation* of the subject. The subject is, at the same time, positive self-relatedness, the *self-certainty* of which is opposed to this negation of itself. In other words, the process begins with the awareness of *deficiency*, and the *drive* to overcome it. The condition which occurs here is that of an external *stimulation*, in which the negation of the subject which is strung in opposition, is posited in the form of an object.”

8 It is worth to notice how relevant is the early Hegelian works about the subject-object relation for understanding his later thought. Particularly the *Differenzschrift* illustrates the fundamentals of the entire Hegelian speculative philosophy necessary for comprehending the establishment of a practical surrounding through living individuals.

9 In the biology we speak about biological niche in order to identify the practical sphere in which a animal species can live and thrive. These two concepts are indeed very similar, although the notion of niche is much more empirical. A niche is an environmental physical space whose biological conditions are apt to host the biological evolution and life of the individual of a species. The notion of niche is, hence, based on the biological features of a living organism and the possibility they have to fit with the natural conditions of a niche. Because of this fitting, a niche is not simply a physical space since it is also determined by those species that dwell it. It is a concept grasping an interdependence because there cannot be a niche without a living organism hosted in it. Similarly, the notion of practical contest

world radically changes it, because it introduces an autonomous entity able to dwell and transform it for its own sake. This occurs because animal Self builds a practical perimeter within which it acts and thrives following a self-referential and internal pattern of normative agency. Although it differs from self-conscious life that explicitly defines what is good for itself and in which habits and norms of acting are socially acknowledged, animal life still remains the fundamental step for having autonomous subjectivity and interaction with the environment, which is the result of having *inwardness* indicating a border between what occurs outside the subjectivity and what is up to the subject itself. Inwardness is not yet a form of representation, which is reserved for self-reflective human consciousness, however it is very close to it because both require a self-reflective concentration on the difference between the outer and inner. Hegel claims, in fact, that animals have experiential content, i.e. a sort of responsiveness of the agent toward the world, which is the result of embodying sensations and turning them into responses (Pinkard 2012, 25–27).

One of the most compelling aspects of the Hegelian theory about biological organism puts the focus on the role of sensitive faculty in determining animal life. Feeling is not just any natural disposition, it represents rather the essential requisite to perform actions and reactions within the situational context. Hegel conceives of animal behavior as a reaction to the environment that can be performed by virtue of the sensitive faculty, which is a very natural disposition based on the neural system. The vital response to the surroundings is the reaction to feelings and determines what is danger, food, beverage, shelter, etc. on the basis of biological needs. Without the sensitive faculty we would have no vital response nor, consequently, a behavior nor a form of life distinct from the others. According to Hegel, the development of cerebral and sensitive dispositions is the result of the enactive effort to affirm a network of functions by preserving it from the interferences of the outer world. Sensation is the mark of autonomy because it sets up a relationship with the surrounding through a system of responses to the situational context for the sake of the maintenance of the organism. As we have seen, even single-celled beings have a membrane that sets up the border separating the organic functions from the external reality. However, the sensitive faculty supplies animals with the advantage to

of animal life is shaped by both the animal's homeostasis and the material conditions of the surrounding. The difference with the biological notion of species consists in the fact that a practical contest is defined in terms of the form of life of an animal organism rather than by means of its biochemical features. Nonetheless, both concepts are very similar because they account for the interdependence that life establishes with the outer world by changing it with its own presence.

acquire behaviors and undertake actions in order to defend their own biological goodness.¹⁰ The sensitive faculty represents the specific biological function of the animal by which the practical disposition originates. Therefore, since we define a form of life also by means of its behavioral patterns of agency and not only by means of the tissues of its organs, we can assess that great part of the constitution of a form of life is based on feelings and responses to sensations.

4

As we previously saw, a form of life is not only defined by the biochemical characteristics of tissues and organs, but also by its practical and behavioral dimension, namely by its interacting in the surroundings and responding to stimuli. This makes the animal a living entity with a discrete level of autonomy because its behavior is for great part moulded by its specific way of responding to the environmental conditions. Nonetheless, the fundamental difference with self-conscious life consists in the fact that animal behavior is merely determined by material needs which are naturally given. Therefore, the animal practical dimension is quite rigid and affected by the natural substratum on which life relies. Animal's autonomy is consistent with and limited to the satisfaction of the organic drives and, even though the behaviors are shared among individuals of the same species, we cannot assume that they are picked up by means of social acknowledgment. Animal behaviors are shaped through mating and natural selection and this is the reason why they are shared by the individuals of the same species. However, they do not undertake any social acknowledging or evaluation, since they are transmitted through generations as part of genetic inheritance.

Human beings in this point differ radically because their practices are set up by a self-conscious selection about what is a good practice and what is not, and this is socially carried out. Although humans share with animals the fact

10 For Hegel every animal has feelings and this characteristic distinguishes it from plants. However, this conception has been overcome by modern biology that conceive of animals as heterotroph organisms, basically organisms that need oxygen and cannot use energy from sunlight to convert inorganic carbon dioxide to organic carbon energy to sustain their life like plants do. Hegel's conception of animal life is affected by the observational principle that animals unlike plants autonomously move in the surroundings by means of the situation in which they find themselves. Therefore, he assumes that the main feature of animal life is having feelings, whereas in modern taxonomy some organisms without a sensitive faculty are classified in the biological kingdom of *Animalia* due to their heterotrophic characteristics.

of having a practical dimension of interaction with the environment, the way how this dimension is molded is totally different because of the self-conscious nature of the former. Hegel correctly points out that self-knowledge radically changes the life of the human species in comparison to the others because it changes its relationship with what is natural. Self-knowledge is mind and basically overcomes the condition of being subjected to external conditioning by “reducing what is external to the inwardness which mind itself is” (Hegel *PM*, § 381 *Zusatz*). Mind establishes the premises for evolving a free agency within a determined and naturally given body by conceptually grasping both the reality and itself within this reality.¹¹ Self-knowledge is the “self-elevation to its truth” (Hegel *PM*, § 379 *Zusatz*), namely the determination of norms and principles by which its independence from external conditioning can be assured. The sublation of nature’s externality occurs through the conceptual and makes possible the transition from nature to mind, namely the coming into itself of the mind recognizing the conceptual as its own product. This speculative identity of the mind is what yields freedom as the opposite of external conditioning, therefore it can only be achieved as a self-distinction from plain nature. As we already saw, the speculative identity of mind is the core of Hegelian naturalism, and it also has a fundamental role in marking the difference between animal and self-conscious life. In animal life the interaction with the environment is based on individual sensations and individual responses which does not achieve the universality of thought and the related distinction from nature like in human subjectivity. This happens because animal feelings and responses are necessary for the satisfaction of animal’s needs and instincts and consequently they remain just natural, i.e. affected by externality. Although the vital responses to the environment contribute to determine the universal shape of a species or form of life, as we saw, the forms of life of the animals are not completely internalized because they lack self-awareness. In other words, animal life is “spiritless” (Hegel *PM*, § 381 *Zusatz*) because it is not result of self-determination like in the mankind, in which the universal character of the life-form is shaped by the explicit elaboration of its own concept.¹² Mind is, according to Hegel, the

11 Hegel *PM*, § 379: “The self-feeling of the mind’s *living* unity spontaneously resists the fragmentation of the mind into different *faculties, forces*, or, what comes to the same thing, activities, represented as independent of each other. But the need for *comprehension* here is stimulated even more by the oppositions, which at once present themselves, between the mind’s *freedom* and the mind’s *determinism*, of the free agency of the soul in contrast to the bodiliness external to it, and again the intimate connection between the two.”

12 Hegel *PM*, § 381 *Zusatz*: “the animal, the most complete form of this internalization, exhibits only the spiritless dialectic of transition from one individual sensation filling up its whole soul to another individual sensation which equally exclusively dominates it; it

formal determination of the sensation and for this reason it is pure abstraction from contingency and from externality and affirmation of itself as something steadily *identical* to itself (Hegel *PM*, § 382). This occurs because it enacts norms of agency and thinking that are supposed to categorically describe how something has to be or not to be done by virtue of the logical and formal coherence of speculative thinking. In this way, mind shapes the human form of life as an act of self-legislation and self-determination and keeps it away from being a genus governed by external influences.

Being identical with itself implies a cognitive effort, namely a formal analysis of the concept of *itself*, what is subject to consistency with the principles autonomously deduced and inferentially articulated. This represents the fundamental and naturalistic vital force of humankind determining its own degree of freedom and independence. Hegel connects the formal characteristic of mind, from which the concept and the idea of freedom originates, to the natural requisites of inwardness proper of life. Freedom is a condition that can be achieved by means of mind's self-identification, whose abstractness, however, has not to be conceived as unnatural, but rather as part of the evolution of life. Since "all activities of mind are nothing but various ways of reducing what is external to the inwardness which mind itself is" (Hegel *PM*, § 318 *Zusatz*), freedom is the outcome of such reducing, which places the outer reality under orders of concept autonomously elaborated.¹³ As we saw, this process of bringing externality into the inwardness of the concept is strictly related to the living activity, which establishes the reality of the internal network of living functions and their goodness. The mental activity brings the concept of life

is man who first raises himself above the individuality of sensation to the universality of thought, to awareness of himself, to the grasp of his subjectivity, of his I—in a word, it is only man who is thinking mind and by this, and by this alone, is essentially distinguished from nature. What belongs to nature as such lies behind the mind; it is true that mind has within itself the entire content of nature, but the determinations of nature are in the mind in a radically different way from that in which they are in external nature."

- 13 The supreme moment of freedom in Hegel's system is unquestionably represented by the absolute spirit in which spirit comes to know itself as spirit through its own finite moments and their self-expression in history. Absolute spirit is certainly an act of self-knowledge, integral part of that dynamic of autonomy and independence proper of the concept and of self-consciousness. It is the act of true philosophical knowledge, which as the highest moment of the system understands the system itself unitarily. However, this does not necessarily commit us to explain it in terms of substantial monism because in spite of its non-historical character absolute spirit represents the structure itself of history, namely the logical, universal and ideal aspects of freedom by which human history is plausible.

into the explicit expression proper of self-conscious life, whose identity represents its own independence from external conditionings.

The natural dispositions of mind and self-knowledge radically change the human biological organism and its way of constituting its own agency and practical sphere because they bring on to the scene patterns of behaviors that are not naturally given but rather autonomously elaborated. In fact, human soul is not constituted by mere reactions to the environment, but rather by the constitution of practices that are socially acknowledged. Soul represents the first step of the Hegelian philosophy of mind because through it self-conscious life differentiates from animal life by evolving habits that shape the individual soul as a social outcome. Nonetheless, Hegel conceives of the soul just as a natural mind by which "*consciousness* awakes ... [and] become[s] self-knowing reason" (Hegel *PM*, § 387). It represents the bridge between animal life and self-conscious life, however it does not completely fulfill the conditions of autonomy and freedom like the further steps of self-conscious life do.

5

Habits' acquisition represents the first step towards self-conscious life since it supports the personal integration into a social context of behaviors, which are socially established. Hegel is right to consider the soul as a property that we share with animals (*anima* in Latin means soul) because the soul is what animates both animals and humans by determining reactions to the environment and the consequent control over outer reality. In this way, the perceptive faculty is very important because every behavior is understandable in terms of an answer to stimuli coming from the external environment, consequently the premise for having a soul is having feelings and sensations. As we often underlined, life is an independent relational property that is not determined by external causes but rather by an internal design of functions. Defining a form of life essentially means describing the kind of relation it establishes with the environment. Plants normally react to the presence of water and sunlight by orienting their own roots and leaves, but this kind of reaction is not properly based on sensation although some authors like Aristotle claim that even plants have a soul. According to Hegel, a living subject needs a neurological system in order to have feelings and a soul.¹⁴ However, whereas animals reacts

14 Recent studies about plant's behavior point out that plants do have a comparable perceptive faculty and a connected sort of awareness about the surrounding although they lack a neural central system. Moreover, also animals without a central nervous system have

in terms of fixed behaviors externally determined by the evolution of their own species, humans evolve habits which are socially decided and culturally transmitted. Hegel treatise on soul and habits is compelling because it accounts for the naturalistic character of habits acquisition and social integration, which are understood as the premise for the “awaking of the I” (Hegel *PM*, § 412). In fact, by means of habits the subject becomes aware of the body by “incorporating” feelings and evolving skills and practices.

Becoming aware of the body means being able to use the body for actions and practical activities that the subject is expected to perform within its own social and linguistic environment. This highlights the extremely social nature of the human being whose practical dimension and attitude is not given nor established by natural genes, but rather determined by social interaction.

Language acquisition is a good example to start. We acquire a language like an habit by incorporating feelings like sounds and understanding them in terms of meaningful words expressed by intentional human beings. The sound of a word would be just a sound for non rational animals, whilst a human is able to understand it in terms of a word which is codified within a system of communication and intentional coordination. The social pressure to be integrated in a context of interpersonal communication leads individuals to acquire the rules of a language by mastering the parts of the body necessary for performing it. The acquisition of this skill is not independent from the training of the respective parts of the body involved in its performing, like articulation of sounds, capacity to recognize the words, capacity to perform a logical analysis of the syntactical structure of the sentences, etc. Given the bodily characteristics to perform a habit, each competence can only be acquired by incorporating feelings in the way of accepted social practices. This incorporation is often referred to as *bodiliness* or mastery over the body. What is interesting in this vision is the *crossed stratification* between body and social competencies and rules required for having habit acquisition. In fact, habits are performed by the body thank to the control exerted by the I, although they are decided outside the body itself, since they are collectively acknowledged and scrutinized. In other words, the person as a social entity is shaped, or “awaken” as Hegel prefers to say, by encompassing feelings in order to be consistent with

behaviors that we can describe in terms of reaction to the environment. This difference probably depends on the definition we decide to give to the notion of behavior, however, for Hegel the soul is something strictly related to the presence of a central neural system since it is quite similar to the human physiology. It can be regarded as a limit of knowledge at the time and not as a limit of Hegel's conception of life.

the social domain. Although this process is natural, it does not produce mere natural behaviors like in animals, it rather develops into the replication of social habits. Also animals embody feelings and sensations that they convert into instincts and relative behaviors: for instance, hunger results in the instinct of looking for food and in the behavior distinctive of the respective species (predation, chewing grass, gathering fruits, etc.). However, human beings are more socially integrated and their behaviors are socially evaluated, therefore they are expected to abide by social norms and rules and to deploy bodily dispositions to perform social habits.

Hegel's conception of evolved biological organisms, namely animals with a central nervous system, is based on a novel conception of the perceptive faculty that is regarded as the very natural premise for both animal behaviors and human social habits. Hegel often highlights that animal independence is very developed because animals are able to move within space, to occupy a niche, to react to the environment, and even to have memory of past experiences. In order to illustrate these attitudes in terms of a naturalistic explanation, he has to deal with the specific intersection of feeling and behavior which are two different objects of investigation. Feeling is a natural phenomenon and can be addressed by means of a natural description of the central nervous system, behaviors are instead something that cannot be totally reduced to a scientific image of the world. Behaviors are in fact something that is manifested and whose description cannot be reduced to a chemical-physical description of any natural tissue. Hegel acknowledges the tight dependence of nature and behavior by underlining that feelings must be incorporated in order to have a behavior, namely they must be translated into a respective and consistent behavior (hunger in searching food, thirst in looking for water ponds, fear in fleeing from the danger, etc.). A non incorporate feeling would just be a solicitation without any result in the life of the involved living organism, like for example dreaming that are not incorporated in any relevant manifest behavior. The spontaneous nature of behaving and acting in an environment is characterized by including feelings and sensations into coherent patterns of reactive and proactive actions, which define the species and their form of life as distinctive and autonomy response to the environment. Therefore, Hegel's explanation of habits crucially integrates his conception of life by addressing the key question of perception as a natural disposition embodied into customs, which distinguish the different species and introduce human spiritual life. This issue points out Hegel's effort to establish continuity between nature and spirit by describing the emergence of aware life out of pure natural requisites.

6

The connection between habits and sociality relies on the fact that the acquisition of the former can be shared by individuals of the same species by virtue of their own common natural and biological characteristics. Language, for example, is a practice for which humans can be trained because they socially interact through vocal communication, what individuals of other species cannot because of a natural gap. Human beings organize and self-incorporate feelings and experiences in a similar way and share the possibility to achieve the same skills and perform the same practices. Since habits are universal ways of the soul, i.e. ways in which individual soul incorporates feelings by evolving general rules and practices, members of the mankind are able to share them and to institutionalize common forms of life. Consequently, there is a strict relation between the natural constitution of the soul by feelings' self-incorporation and the establishment of social habits and practices, which is rooted in the peculiar homeostasis of the human organism. The singular individual, in fact, can be trained into practices that are universally codified by rules and symbols and socially transmitted by means of linguistic communication. The human organism is, therefore, naturalistically shaped for the evolution of practices that can be considered as a second nature,¹⁵ i.e. a nature posited by the natural disposition of the soul to self-incorporate feelings and shape the corporality.

While other animals do not change the naturalness of their body and its condition of otherness (according to Hegel nature is "permanence of otherness", Hegel *PM*, § 247), human soul is able to engrave sensations into the dimension of practices and rules and to reorganize the externality and otherness of sensation into habits, by which individual of the same species can be trained and educated. The peculiar feature of mind activity is properly the "return from [the] otherness" (Hegel *PM*, § 105), namely its capacity to grasp reality by the adequate codification of uses and customs. Moreover, in the emergence of habits we can see how soul incorporates the particularity of feelings by producing general forms of action, which can be shared with similar individuals. Sociality and second nature are, hence, the outcome of the spontaneous

¹⁵ Hegel *PM*, § 410: "The natural qualities and alterations of age, of sleeping and waking, are immediately natural; habit is the determinacy of feeling ... made into something that is natural, mechanical. Habit has rightly been called a second nature: nature: *nature*, because it is an immediate being of the soul, a *second* nature, because it is an *immediacy* posited by the soul, incorporating and moulding the bodiliness that pertains to the determinations of feeling as such and to the determinacies of representation and of the will in so far as they are embodied."

activity of mind, which evolves norms on the basis of the general form of life of the human species (Seddone 2018). This species and its evolutive and dynamic history determine the natural background on which practices, values and rules are developed, and this underlines the strong connection between life and practice that recently has also been highlighted by thinkers like Philippa Foot (2001) and Michael Thompson (2008). The link between life and practice highlights that the practical dimension is not based on transcendental principles of acting, but rather on principles connected to the general and immanent attitude of the agents to individuate goodness and evil for every form of life. This general and immanent attitude is the requisite necessary for overcoming the particular moment of the natural subject and achieving shared forms of practices defining the mankind beyond its natural requisites and through a historical and contextual denotation. In Hegel's philosophy habits represent the first step of subjective spirit in overcoming nature as "permanence of otherness" (Hegel *PM*, § 247) and the first definition of practices that can be shared by virtue of their universal character of norms of acting and believing. They are the result of the soul's capacity to incorporate body's feelings and to mold them into universal forms of action characterizing a social group and eventually the human species itself. The connection between life and practice defended by Hegel and recently by M. Thompson (2008) highlights the fact that our species cannot be exclusively described by means of biological requisites since it determines itself through practices that are autonomous acts of actualized freedom and emancipation from nature's otherness.

However, habits pertain to the domain of the soul, which is a natural faculty, and not to the realm of self-conscious life, in which the question about the independence from external conditioning achieves an aware formulation and can be directly addressed. Therefore, one cannot state that the acquisition of habits makes the individual free and autonomous because it just represents the adjusting of individual behavior to socially ruled activities and practices. Only self-consciousness can thoroughly tackle the question of freedom because it is a reflective disposition based on the speculative understanding of [A] the self, [B] the otherness and [C] the self's experiencing of the otherness.

In spite of this limitation, Hegel's treatise about habits has relevant consequences on his understanding of human nature and of what he calls subjective spirit or mind. Firstly, it highlights the role of social interaction for attaining the "awaking of the I" because without a social context the subject would lack the social pressure for having feeling self-incorporation. A human person deprived of this context would probably not be able to bear any agency because she would be devoid of the sense of identification with other similar beings, which is the necessary requisite for apprehending habits, competencies and skills.

Secondly, this approach accounts for the strongly interdependence of feeling and behavior and explains this in terms of a naturalistic and homeostatic conception of the biological organism. It also accounts for a solid continuity between animal and human life. In fact, since behavior is a reaction to the conditions of the environment, it cannot be given without having sensations and feelings, which need to be embodied in order to have an adequate behavioral response to the surrounding. In animal doings we observe, hence, an enactive response to the environment that is linked to the general wealth or homeostasis of the individual animal because the behavioral reply (feeding, hunting, fleeing, looking for a shelter, etc.) is connected to the maintenance of its own network of biological functions. What happens in human life is a significative evolution because in this life-form practices are not set up by means of a natural evolution of the instincts, they rather established within the social interpersonal contexts in which the conducts are evaluated, decided and evolved. Nonetheless, their acquisition and the consequent development of a subjective human agency abide by the same principles of self-incorporation of feelings that we also discern in animal life. This is the reason why habits represent a second nature, the first step into self-conscious life and, eventually, the first step of its naturalistic exposition.

Extended and Embodied Mind

1

This chapter deals with two aspects of Hegel's conception of mind [*Geist*] that are often addressed by contemporary philosophies of mind, respectively the idea of extended mind and that of embodied mind. That of mind is a controversial philosophical notion because philosophers do not agree about an unitary definition and because they mostly agree about what mind is not. We know that mind is not the brain as we define it in terms of logical, linguistic and behavioral competencies that are developed by the mindful beings themselves, whereas the brain is naturally given and it did not change a lot in the last millennia of the historical evolution of the mankind. For a similar reason we can state mind is not equivalent to subjective believing, as the intentional, normative and logical aspects of cognitive competencies are not only intersubjectively shared but also socially evaluated, learned and established. For instance, a statement like [A] "I believe that this sea is very rich in fish" cannot be included in the definition of mind although it can be founded on mindful reasons. [A] is rather an individual belief mostly based on conventions and common certainties about this sea that has no normative status because it is not necessarily connected to any social acknowledgement. [A] differs radically from a statement like [B] "this sea is rich in fish and fishing is allowed each other days" by which a practice is established and disciplined. [B] is similar to statements like [C] "in English plurals nouns have the final s as suffix", [D] "EU foresees free circulation of people and wares within its borders", [E] "the class will be at 9:00am on Monday during the Spring term", [F] "ancient Roman right disciplined the relations between the Senate and the people of Rome". Those examples point out that beyond subjective beliefs and thoughts there is a normative and cognitive sphere that has the normative power to shape both individual intentionality and social life.

Mind has certainly the power to both establish and understand the normative frame of one's own practical life, and therefore it is not separable from individual subjectivity. However, the normative frame through which our intentionality and thought acquire legitimacy is more extended than the individual rational capacity as it is evolved socially. By virtue of these considerations it is quite adequate to avoid the Cartesian idea that nothing is closer to the mind than the mind itself that is implicit in the *Cogito ergo sum*, and we

should rather reconsider mind from a Wittgensteinian perspective and assume that intentionality is intrinsically connected to the social dimension of what he calls “linguistic games” and our social practices. Since individual intentionality cannot be conceived as independent from a social integration, we should regard rationality as shaped by our practical life, rather than as a natural and non-historical feature. Every scrupulous reader of authors like Wittgenstein, Anscombe, Rorty and Davidson would have many concerns in using the expression itself on “individual mind” as there is nothing more obsolete and philosophically speaking less useful than this notion from the point of view of those thinkers. The question now is: if there is nothing called “individual mind”, what about the individual cognitive capacities and intentional attitudes? Of course, they exist and exhibit some degree of independence as the individual rational subject is autonomous, but they are not sufficiently relevant for the justification and endorsement of the cognitive contents. In other words, things like the justification of the grammar rules of any natural language, the rules of mathematics, the principles on which the natural sciences rely, the rules of the traffic, the principles of the constitution of a nation, the moral values and virtues, etc. are based on social acceptance and acknowledge, and the individual understanding of them is strictly connected to social integration.

Speaking a natural language, for instance, requires the compliance with semantical and syntactical rules that are for their greatest part intrinsically related to the history and the social practices of the linguistic community of the speakers of that language, therefore the compliance itself with the rules is the result of an adequate integration into that community. Similarly, understanding formal languages like mathematics and logics relies on the social process of learning, although those languages are intrinsically based on self-evidence and on a very neutral conception of rationality. Another example is represented by social norms, like the rules of traffic or of social games like chess, which can only be learned if related to the practices whose execution is possibly when the participants agree about the same rules (Wittgenstein 1958, §§ 31–32). Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* appropriately points out that disregarding the practical nature of language would lead us to the misconception that language is based on the mere ostensive role of naming things, whereas the entire human existence relies on the close affinity between language and activities that he conceives as *linguistic games*. When we learn a language, following him, we learn a practice and we acquire a mastery over a practical dimension governed by socially accepted norms (Wittgenstein 1958, § 150), namely we understand something that is intrinsically related to the practice itself, rather than to the simple individual rationality. Wittgenstein straightforwardly highlights that the borders between semantics and pragmatics are very

faded since the cognitive aspects entailed in understanding a rule are strictly connected to the participation to the linguistic game and to the concrete fact of being a participant of some social activity. There is, thus, no “individual mind” as an independent faculty to elaborate cognitive elements, because the linguistic and cognitive activities themselves are strictly linked to the elaboration of norms and rules governing the practical domain. The obsolete nature of the notion of “individual mind” is connected to the Cartesian principle that nothing is closer to the mind than the mind itself, which is, however, a tautological principle that only explains tautological concepts and ideas. There is no reason, instead, to believe that mind is the closest thing to the mind itself only because of the self-evidence of the *cogito ergo sum*, there are rather many reasons to believe that the mind operates through the linguistic and cognitive aspects by which the social practices are developed and interwoven.

Since that of “individual mind” is an inappropriate and misleading notion, which is the real nature of the human mind? The right answer, I believe, is that mind represents the universal mode of grasping common practices, and by them of grasping the real nature of the human being as a self-conscious being (Stekeler-Weithofer 2005 and 2014). In fact, it is philosophically relevant that, beyond the very practical sphere of first singular person perspective, we understand social activities in terms of forms of practices, namely modes of acting and of being recognized for personal masteries and competencies. Mind, *der Geist* for Hegel, is properly this faculty to represent the human activities in terms of forms of life (*Lebensformen* according to Wittgenstein), namely in terms of the practical organization of human life. The very essence of *Geist* is indeed its intersubjective character (“I that is We and We that is I”, Hegel *PoS*, 110) and its being ruled by an impersonal and normative authoritative reason (Pinkard 1994, 66–67, 79–80).¹ The notion itself of individual mind clashes with the assumption that both the forms of the practices and their normative nature by which we grasp them are socially established and evolved throughout an historical development. The representation of an individual mind as the primary bearer of cognitive contents is the mere result of a monological reflection about those contents (like norms, values, rules, language, etc.) that overlooks their practical and intersubjective constitution.

1 I am referring here to finite spirit, namely the spirit historicized by means of its own concrete historical moments. The non-historicized spirit is the absolute one, namely the absolute freedom that has no historical unfolding but that can be grasped through an act of thought. This moment is important for conceiving the fundamental categories of self-conscious life as a pure act of reflection that is independent from understanding its finite moments.

Since mind is not appropriately conceived as a bare individual faculty, but rather as the mode by which a practice can be grasped through its own form, it is obvious to conceive of it as an extended faculty, namely as a common feature by which social activities and institutions are collectively endorsed and acknowledged. Individual subjectivity and intelligence can be hence better explained by means of the notions of membership and personhood, which account for the dependence of the individual on the social context, rather than by making recourse to the idea of individual mind as a natural cognitive disposition. The idea that any cognitive content is, as a matter of fact, related to universal forms of practices implies that it is scrutinized by means of what we can define *common mind*, namely a practical and normative dimension promoting individual and personal intentional dispositions. In fact, even the most pedestrian case of intention or description of a practice, like for example the intention to grab an apple, requires “an implicit claim about the relevant form or context” (M. Thompson 2008, 56–57) of that intention or practice, context that is understood in terms of conventionalized activities.

Given the necessity to make recourse to a “wide context” for understanding our cognitive and intentional contents, a revision of the Cartesian conception of mind requires starting to conceive of the mental as something that is set up in an extended and common way, namely in the mode of practices and forms of practices. As a consequence of this, the individual mind will be seen very differently, and for sure not as the only source of cognitive competencies, but rather as outcome of belonging to a community historically constituted through those forms of practices. As P. Pettit rightly claims, the individual thought requires a common source because otherwise we would be misled to assimilate it to those artificial intentional systems that are externally programmed, fixed and do not sustain any development of their own features due to the lack of social integration (Pettit 1996). Any human and self-conscious competency requires rather to be explained by making recourse to a wider and common cognitive context that is cognitively organized, i.e. in terms of forms of practices. A good proof of this is represented by the acquisition of the personal intentional, practical and cognitive skills. In fact, learning or acquiring a practice requires the mental effort to understand why and how something has to be done by discerning the rationale implicit in every practice. Abandoning the notion of individual mind in favor of that of a common or extended mind changes our way of disclosing human thought and reveals also the importance of Hegel’s concept of *Geist* and of its implications. The importance of this notion relies, in fact, on the power it exerts on our social organization and institution, and even in determining world history, and it can be even regarded as the state-of-the-art of this topic.

2

German lacks the concept of mind in terms of a defined faculty and this explains much about the issues related to the translation of the word *Geist*. *Verstand* is the German word for understanding and it is mostly used for naming the individual cognitive competence related to facts and situations. *Vernunft* means reason and indicates the more general faculty of thinking, however it is just a faculty and not an activity because it has no relation to the English verb “to reason”, which can be partially translated with the verb *denken*. *Geist* is indeed a complex word because in the German literature is often used in terms of an emotive condition determined by some external and spiritual power (*Begeistert* means, for instance, fascinated). Moreover, it is often also used in terms of a collective sentiment or awareness, like in the expression *Volksgeist* (folk spirit). Any further philological enquire about the precise translation of the notion “mind” as individual intelligence in German would fail, and this because such concept is sufficiently well expressed by the words *Verstand* and *Vernunft*. This might even explain why German philosophers unlike French and English are mostly immune from the issues generated by the notion of “individual mind”, what makes their philosophical speculation so akin, in my opinion, to the ancient Greek one that could deploy the very wide notion of λόγος. Thus, in German the notion of mind can be only conveyed by stressing its common and extended sense, namely through the word *Geist*. This implies that *Phänomenologie des Geistes* might be correctly translated as *Phenomenology of the Common Mind*, what would probably skip many misconceptions related to the bare translation of *Geist* as spirit. Although the hypothesis to change the translation of word *Geist* in both the title and in the entire book with the expression “common mind” might seem improbable, I believe that it is worth to highlight how misleading the translation “spirit” is and that a more appropriate one would broadly reduce the difficulties to interpret this egregious philosophical masterpiece.

Hegel’s philosophy of mind strenuously defends the idea of a common or extended mind and practically excludes any possibility to account for the individual mind also due to the characteristics of German language, as we already mentioned. The result is that the cognitive faculty has to be conceived as impersonal and common and that the mere subjective rational authority does not conduce to establish a *Geist*. This is the reason why the chapter on *Spirit* only comes in the second part of the book, although the notion itself of *Geist* is already cited in the chapter about self-consciousness. How is it possible that the main subject of the book is addressed only in the second part, whereas it is scarcely mentioned in the first one? The reason probably relies on the fact that

Hegel had to introduce this kind of impersonal rational authority as the result of the failure of any attempt to establish a *personal and individual authority*. These attempts depends on self-consciousness' eagerness to independence and autonomy that is manifestly a subjective characteristic. Following Pinkard's interpretation, the struggle for recognition "is thus an instance of the more general way in which agents seek reassurances that what they take to be authoritative *really* is authoritative, and much of the dialectic of master and slave will turn on what is required for this kind of reassurance to be possible" (Pinkard 1994, 53). The necessity to establish an authoritative reason is very originaive in self-conscious life and we can rightly state that "out of the dialectic of recognition between master and slave, Hegel will develop his conception of the *social* nature of knowledge" (Pinkard 1994, 53). However, self-consciousness cannot develop any *impersonal* authoritative reason because the only authority it can bear is subjective, which is the result of individual authoritative frames, like that of master and slave and that based on the emancipation through labor. Those personal authoritative frames are evolved out of the struggle for recognition, which belongs to the elementary logical structure of self-conscious life along with desire and concept.

The very originaive forms of socialization that Hegel addresses in the chapter on self-consciousness, and especially the struggle for recognition, are important because they represent the source of both certainty and authority as pre-requisites of any social ontology. However, they do not thoroughly define the crucial notion of *Geist* because they just establish a personal authority, rather than an impersonal and universal one. The famous definition of *Geist* as "I that is We and We that is I" (Hegel *PoS*, 110) is placed in the chapter on Self-Consciousness because the struggle of recognition stands for the primary instance for establishing social cooperation out of individual self-consciousness features, although *Geist* as the universal substance of the human history can be reached once the authority it represents becomes impersonal. As Pinkard (1994) rightly claims, Hegel introduces stoicism, skepticism and the unhappy consciousness after the dialectics of recognition because he has to explain the evolution of social authority into a more universal and impersonal force able to define the forms of practices as the historical and institutional social organization of mankind. Although one cannot fully understand the notion of *Geist* without accounting also for the notion of self-consciousness, its complete evolution is possible by overcoming the limits of the individual struggle and by defining it as a cultural and institutional power.

This elucidates both the extended nature of the notion of *Geist* and the fact that it results to be very close to the English notion of mind, namely the faculty of elaborating ideas and cognitive contents in terms of forms of practices. In

fact, *Geist* exerts a power over the social and institutional organization of the humankind and over its own historical course by means of a typology of authority that results to be independent from individual mastery. Therefore, according to Hegel, mind is common to the extent that it shapes the institutional, legal and social organization of a folk by establishing an ideal of self-conscious life. The fact that general principles and norms governing a society are commonly accepted by its members demonstrates that that society could not exist without those principles. For instance, the principle of juridical person would not be understandable without social acceptance, likewise the entire juridical system of a State would not be effective and could not be enforced without relying its legitimacy on an extended thought that entitles it to have some normative powers on individual citizens. Although Hegel conceives of *Geist* as an all-pervasive normative substance, he also maintains that its power is based on social acceptance, namely on the recognition of the social functions of social objects like norms, roles, rules and laws. This makes his philosophy partially close to that proposed by J. Searle who more recently elaborated a theory about the constitution of social facts (Searle 1996 and 2010). Searle proposes a lucid and straightforward theory about the constitution of social reality that points out that every social object has a *function of status* based on collective acceptance and that without such acceptance its social role would be lost. The social acceptance has the power to strengthen or weaken the normative frame of the social domain by establishing social facts and objects having entitlements and duties. In other words, the significance of a social object is determined by the way how it is accepted and conceived by the members of the community in which it exerts some social status or role, and it cannot be considered as independent from such shared acknowledgment. However, Searle's notion of extended mind is limited to the cognitive and linguistic disposition of the humans to assign a social status to objects or individuals and to collectively endorse it. He does not mention at all the possibility of a common mind that determines the social activities by grasping them as forms of practices, namely by treating them as formal and normative structures of interpersonal interaction and human civilization.

Hegel's conception of *Geist* is instead very wide and pervasive because he aims at explaining the logic itself of human history and social life by developing a systematic thinking about the conditions of what we called social practices. Following him, history, right, political institutions, trade, commerce and the other cooperative activities cannot be evolved randomly nor by changes, they ought to have some logical foundation promoting their own plausibility and durability. Thus, we grasp them conceptually, namely by means of the formal understanding of their own truth and effectiveness (*Wirklichkeit*). Since

any practical outcome, both individual and collective, represents the expression of an internal principle rationally elaborated, there is a tight relation between the practical outcome itself and the way in which we think of it and replicate it. Let us consider an institution like the university, for instance. We know that the first universities were founded in Europe in the 13th century, that we currently find them everywhere in the world, that they grant their students some academic titles useful for finding a job, that professors are hired among the worldwide most influential scholars and so on. We may fill a long list of things related to the university, but, of course, it would not be helpful for grasping what the university is. In order to understand it we need a general definition or a concept of it by which we would acknowledge it as a form of practice. This would be much more advanced than the mere list of descriptive facts concerning the academia because it would encompass all the activities, individual duties, commitments, entitlements, oughts, etc. by explaining their internal interdependence. This happens because the university is not just its history nor its buildings nor the activities of its members, but rather an institution consistently organized by the division of tasks, rights and duties among its members. In other words, it can be correctly grasped as a concept or form of practice that would highlight its “spirit”, i.e. the reasons for its members to participate in it.

As B. Brandom rightly puts it, the game of giving and asking for reasons is a discursive practice through which an activity can be defined by rationally assigning commitments and entitlements to its participants. The fact that this game renders the activity both intelligible and organized by means of individual rational oughts makes us able to conceive of it as formally structured because it relies on rational obligations and on the so called “force of the better reason” (Brandom 1994, 16–17).² Hence, an accurate analysis of human practices supplies us with a straightforward explanation of human social activities, which clarifies that they can be understood as formally organized. Likewise,

2 Brandom 1994, 16–17: “The recognition that the consequences of attributing intentionally contentful states must be specified in normative terms may be summed up in the slogan, ‘Attributing an intentional state is attributing a normative status’: This is one of the leading ideas to be pursued in the present investigation. Intentional states and acts have contents in virtue of which they are essentially liable to evaluations of the ‘force of the better reason’. It is this mysterious ‘force’—evidently the core of the social practices of giving and asking for reasons—that Greek philosophy investigated and appealed to in demarcating us from the non-rational background of items that we can think and find out about but that cannot themselves think or find out about other things. This ‘force of the better reason’ is a normative force. It concerns what further beliefs one is *committed* to acknowledge, what one *ought* to conclude, what one is *committed* or *entitled* to say or do.”

Hegel's notion of *Geist* aims at conceiving of the social and historical dimension as constituted by means of an authoritative reason that makes it intelligible. Since *Geist* stands for an *impersonal* authoritative reason the kind of power it exerts differs from that of the master over the slave, although it remains a force able to determine the course of human history and the shapes of its institutions. The power of the master is a personal matter because it is established by means of a direct experience, i.e. the struggle, whereas the power of the *Geist* is like the power exerted by the values, norms and rules over a community: they shape its principles and determine what matters for its members. This is the reason why Hegel introduces the chapter on *Geist* with a quotation from Sophocles' *Antigone* in order to explain the effectiveness of what he calls the *ethical substance*, namely the system of the normative ethical principles (Hegel *PoS*, 297–298). This ethical substance, unlike the principles of reason, is expected to be free from self-contradictory statements because they are integral part of the constitution of the community in which they are deployed. Whereas the principles of reason are supposed to be scrutinized by the individual rational faculty, and this causes their self-contradictory nature, the ethical substance sets out its own effectiveness because it is intrinsically and ontologically related to the historical and social context in which the human practices are embedded. Since the practical agent is constituted by means of the integration in those practices, her practical dispositions and competencies are shaped by belonging to a social context. In this domain there is no rational need to defy the validity of normative principles since they represent the glue itself of the social life and interaction. With the chapter about *Spirit* in the *Phenomenology* Hegel reaches the point in which social practices can be eventually historicized since they change and improve through their own historical evolution, rather than by means of the internal rational disputes among their members that are much more abstract and decontextualized. The forms of practice described in this chapter are not self-contradictory because they are historically contextualized and can be conceived as expressions of human civilization and history. This is the reason why the notion of *Geist* is so strongly linked to Hegel's philosophy of history, as it represents the collective, historical and shareable nature of human species.

Therefore, the reflection itself about human history and its civilizations is the reflection about a *Geist*, namely about the timely bounded *common/extended* mind of a culture or a nation that has in its values, principles, styles, arts, language, political and legal institutions and tradition its own normative frame, that we properly grasp through *forms of practices* (Stekeler-Weithofer 2005 and 2014).

3

The reason why notion of *Geist* is consistent with that of common or extended mind is related to the social nature of human rationality and intentionality, which are biologically shaped for providing cooperation with the other human beings (Tomasello 1999 and 2008). In other words, human cooperation would not be even possible without the articulated system of signs, words and language by which human beings set up a common context and agree about practical issues. As Tomasello (1999 and 2008) clearly explains, the biological capacity to share a joint attention about practical issues is the natural requisite of the mankind by which the development of natural languages has been possible as the enhancement of collaborative abilities. With natural languages a symbolic and significative system of communication has been established, cooperative activities have been improved and communication has been finally conventionalized, evolving also the possibility to preserve and pass on the experience of our ancestors by means of writing. There must be, thus, a link between joint attention, natural language, cooperation, cultural evolution and human civilization that sheds light on the extraordinary evolution of our species as result of its cooperative disposition (Tomasello 2014). Although Hegel does not account for natural human evolution, he fundamentally explains human civilization as a matter of establishing an impersonal authority governing the evolution of the social and institutional domain. The notion of *Geist* is therefore consistent with the contemporary notion of common or extended mind because it points out the role of the intersubjective and practical disposition to share a common ground on which cooperation, institutions and the achievement of shared goals become possible. Hegel unitarily connects the cognitive faculty to the practical and social context and to human history by rendering the notion of *Geist* all-pervasive. In fact, it can be conceived as both a substance and a subject that evolves like a will, but that also substantiates human history making possible to understand it unitarily. This general will is, of course, collectively shaped, namely by means of the contributions of its own participants, what we can define as *dialectics of self-conscious life*. In fact, spirit has to be intended as the unitary system of interpersonal dependence among individual persons belonging to the same cooperative and political organization, like for instance a *polis*, a State, a nation or any institutionalized body. These social entities are shaped by means of the dialogical collision of different ideas and contributions offered by their participants, which creates a sort of competition for establishing what we previously defined *impersonal authoritative reason*.

However, this competition is no violent and blind force as it is governed by the dialectical logic, a logic based on the power exerted by negation. As we

sustained above, following Hegel autonomy and freedom are possible because of the act of negation to be determined by any external power. Negation is, therefore, the premise and the essence itself of self-determination since it prevents from external conditioning by opposing to any external determination. In other words, negativity, the Self, self-reference, self-determination and eventually freedom are logically combined and their interdependence sheds light on how self-conscious life has been established. One would not fully understand *Geist* without understanding the living and effective dialectics of ideas, reasons, historical persons and institutions that contribute to determine the substance of human history, culture and civilization. This practical unity of reasons, negation and freedom can be logically grasped by means of the concept [*Begriff*] and is what represents the extended character of *Geist* whose freedom is the result of the contribution of each participant. Human mind is, hence, not individually bounded, but rather collectively shaped and it can be cleared only as an extended faculty determined by what we can define as a *logical space of reasons* in which ideas, values and norms can be compared in an impersonal way. Mind is collectively determined, whereas the individual cognitive faculty does not arise independently from the system of norms, rules and beliefs that constitute the social life of a community. Understanding this means explaining knowledge, normativity, ethics and practical organization as collective facts in which individual cognitive faculties are set up as personal response to social drives and needs.

4

Another fundamental aspect connected to Hegel's philosophy of mind concerns the fact that thinking is somehow acquired by means of a process of *embodiment* of forms of knowledge that are commonly accepted by the members of a community. Although the argument of the embodied mind nowadays is a widespread topic, I personally do not agree that the cognitive and inferential capacities rely on a mere process of embodiment because this would jeopardize the principle that reason is a critical faculty able to motivate disagreement and to critically challenge commonly accepted beliefs and certainties. I do not believe, in fact, that thinking is a mere fact of copying and reproducing cognitive behaviors, but rather I maintain that it is the inferential faculty of using concepts and understanding the practical and historical context and that this faculty is related to the question of self-consciousness and self-conscious life. However, some process of acquisition through embodiment is possible especially during the phase of education and social integration in

which practical habits are acquired by means of what we can define as a process of copying or imitation. Such acquisition has not to do with conceptualization or self-consciousness which represent higher steps of rationality, it rather explains how personal identity in a very low level of awareness is shaped and determined by social habits and customs. Personally, I do not believe in the so called *embodied cognition* as cognition depends on the formal, autonomous and inferential elaboration of concepts and ideas that is acquired by means of social integration, whereas the mere “incorporation” of ideas cannot be conceived as an autonomous act of thinking. Nonetheless, we observe in human beings the attitude of acquiring and copying behaviors and habits as result of a process of embodiment of conventionalized activities. A good example is language, which is a conventionalized system of communication based on the articulation of sounds. Although the grammar of every natural language has a logic based on the syntax, namely the way how words are connected, and can be learned through a reflective and autonomous act of reason, every natural language has also the bodily characteristic of the voice and sounds articulation. Infants do not acquire the language through the grammar like when adults learn a foreign or second language, they just learn to reproduce the meaningful sounds of the words by correctly reproducing sounds. In order to that they have to reproduce determinate mouth and tongue movements and coordinate them with the breath in order to reproduce the sounds corresponding to the words. The training required for this is bodily and we can conceive of this kind of effort as embodiment of a practice or habit.³ Hegel rightly underlines that it would not be even possible without what he calls *Selbstgefühl* or self-perceiving, which a sensorial capacity that we share with other animals. This the reason why Hegel deals with embodiment (*Verleiblichung*) in the part of the *Philosophy of Spirit* about the soul (*die Seele*), which represents the very first step of spirit and does not concern the question of self-consciousness that is handled forward in a separated chapter. Those Hegelian scholars who maintain that Hegel defends a novel conception of embodied cognition do completely disregard the fact that for the German philosopher the *Verleiblichung*

3 Hegel *PS*, §410 Z: “Between the mind and its *own* body there is naturally an even more intimate association than between the rest of the external world and mind. Just because of this necessary connection of my body with my soul, the activity immediately exerted by the soul on the body is not a *finite*, not a merely *negative*, activity. First of all, then, I have to maintain myself in this *immediate* harmony of my soul and my body; true, I do not have to make my body an end in itself as athletes and tightrope walkers do, but I must give my body its due, must take care of it, keep it healthy and strong, and must not therefore treat it with contempt or hostility.”

just belongs to the perceptive dimension through which our soul is shaped as a personal character and that it has nothing to do with cognition, thinking, the conceptual and self-consciousness that are more formal and speculative faculties related to reflection and autonomy.⁴ Embodiment is for Hegel the result of having perception and sensitivity about oneself and to manage it by acquiring specific corporeal skills that are accepted and evaluated socially, such as body posture, language, habits, rituals and attitudes. Such practical dimension of uses and customs has nothing to do with the forms of self-conscious life like right, institutions and history because it just belongs to the sphere of soul and sensitivity. It is developed within the community only because it channels the self-perception into conventionalized forms of practices that, however, do not have the consistency and coherence of spiritual life, which is historical. Therefore, saying that Hegel defends a form of embodied cognition is inappropriate and incorrect because he just isolates embodiment within the very first step of spiritual life, i.e. the soul, which is still conditioned from perceptual experiencing. He acknowledges that human soul has to be shaped by means of practical and social forms that he calls habits, however he does not regard them as belonging to the sphere of history and self-consciousness as they lack the formal requisite of being forms of practical life.

We can rather assess that Hegel supplies us with a theory of *embodied normativity* concerning the fact that human organism is defined and governed by homeostatic functions representing the natural form and ground of normativity.⁵ In fact, he conceives of feelings as the naturalistic premises for having

4 Hegel PS, § 410: "This self-incorporation of the particularity or bodiliness of the determinations of feeling into the *being* of the soul appears as a *repetition* of them, and the production of habits appears as *practices*. For, since this being is, in relation to the natural-particular material that is put into this form, abstract universality, it is universality of reflexion: one and the same item, as an external plurality of sensation, is reduced to its unity, and this abstract unity is *posited*."

5 Merker 2012, 162–163: "According to Hegel each organism is determined by the concept or norm of its "nature". This determines how an individual ought to be inasmuch as it belongs to a particular genus, and thereby also how the inner and outer world of the organism ought to be constituted and what it ought to do in order to fulfill its norm and thus not to lose its health and life pre-maturely. It is this "measure" with which the organism constantly gauges the outer and inner world and tries to bring these into correspondence. The "natural" norm determines which organic activities are necessary for maintaining or restoring the homeostasis of the individual organism, and for the self-preservation of the species. It determines how and what can and is permitted to enter and exit the organism and what can be present in and for it. It thus regulates the basic evaluations of the organism in the form of purely organic, unconscious activities that are constitutive of organisms and keep them functional—such as breathing, the intake, digestion and excretion of nutriment and so forth. By virtue of this homeodynamic normativity that can be realized to various degrees, organisms are already in

representations and evaluations, that is for having a kind of spontaneous interaction with the environment: animals have certainly a representation of the objects of their own drives and are also able to choose (think about our pets picking up warmer places in our homes). Animal autonomy is the result of embodying norms of actions by governing feelings and drives and establishing patterns of behaviors—that are mostly genetically inherited and partially learned. What we describe as animal behavior is normatively determined and defines what is good and what is bad for the homeostasis of a form of life and its members. The embodiment is, hence, the result of incorporating feelings in the form of patterns of reactions to the external worlds and to internal needs that can be described normatively, namely as norms of behaviors belonging to a genus or species of individual living beings.

Human beings are, of course, animals and the naturalistic issue of homeostasis—the well being of their own functions—is the same we observe in the rest of the animal kingdom. However, their behavior is not only social, but also socially evaluated and acknowledged, what means that they are able to select and pick appropriate responses to the external surrounding and to the social context in which they are embedded. The reason why we prefer to use the world *habits* instead of *behaviors* when it comes to the mankind is properly because the former can be selected, molded and evaluated whereas the latter are naturally given and cannot be modified. The normativity of habits is shaped by social evaluation whereas the process by which they are acquired is the same we observe in the rest of the animal kingdom, namely a form of feelings governance by setting up patterns of habits that identify the human soul. Hegel highlights the role of the body because the body is the instrument itself by which an habit can be performed and socially acknowledged and this accounts for the naturalistic requisite (the body) for social life (the soul). This process does not concern self-consciousness or rationality because it is a pre-reflexive process of our soul generated by the need to be integrated in a community and recognized as a member. This is the reason why Hegel places it

a basic, although still natural way spiritual beings. Hegel already recognizes in the possibility of deviations from the norm a natural form of freedom of the natural spirit as an ensouled individual that does not necessarily lead to loss of life or organic identity as an entity of a particular kind or species—an individual that is set against nature to which it belongs, on the one hand, and from which it tries to free itself, on the other. Hegel's lack of interest in causal-evolutionary interpretations of the development of spirit suggests that he would be critical of evolutionary interpretations of biological normativity, such as Millikan-style functionalist interpretations that explicate the everyday notion of malfunction and proper functioning at the biological level. He would most certainly criticize these as well as all other non-normative descriptions and causal explanations of organic functions as reductionist."

to very first step of the *Philosophy of Spirit* in which the strong bonds of the *Geist* to the natural dimension are truly underlined. The self-identity of *Geist* becomes here clear as separation from otherness of nature, however habits are just the first step of spiritual life because they are affected by heteronomy and lack spontaneity, the very feature of self-consciousness that will be, hence, addressed in the next chapter of the *Encyclopedia*.

Eventually, the chapter about the soul the habits represents a clear assessment about the naturalistic character of spiritual life, namely about the strong connection between nature and spirit. However, it requires to be considered for what it is, the very early step into spiritual life that is supplied with highly elaborated and sophisticated forms of practical and interpersonal organization.

Natural and Self-conscious Agency

1

Hegel's philosophy of agency represents the core and the premise of its investigation about the objective and collectively established implementation of individual freedom by laws, institutions, rights and social practices. In fact, we cannot understand how social practices and institutions foster liberty without giving an account of the nature of individual agency and the way how we actualize freedom through objective, shared and historical human organizations. Therefore, his philosophy of agency is strictly connected to his philosophy of right and slightly relevant for the contemporary debate about free will and compatibilism although it is also not totally extraneous to it (Yeomans 2012). For our present investigation it is appropriate firstly because freedom represents the highest attainment for individual self-conscious life, therefore we cannot disregard the question about what makes an agent free. The constitution itself of will is closely related to freedom because willing has as its natural presupposition the possibility of its own fulfillment and, consequently, of being free. Since we theoretically have to exclude the possibility of an originally unfree will, just having willingness is a condition necessarily connected to freedom. In the analysis of agency, Hegel also pursues a naturalistic method as he maintains that will has an originary natural source from which we observe the development of specific determinations. However, his analysis is properly based on the logic of agency rather than on the naturalistic aspects because the question of will is strictly connected to logical factors articulating the logical relations between will, freedom and agency. In other words, as we will see, the natural element of will is reduced to its logical implications because the fact itself of having a will (what is natural) triggers a series of inferential consequences with which we have to deal in order to understand the features of human and self-conscious agency.

The main work in which Hegel addresses this issue is the *Philosophy of Right*, mostly in the very first paragraphs (§§ 4–28) in which he introduces the question of will, freedom and determination of will. This collocation already tells us that individual agency is for him a social matter, i.e. an issue that cannot be fully understood by considering the subject out of the social and intersubjective domain. This marks an important difference with contemporary philosophies of action that mostly account for the problem related to the compatibility of

one's own purposiveness with the establishment itself of individual will. In fact, once individual will is established (for instance, through education and acquisition of habits) many aspects connected to its constitution (such as culture, the influence of the family, the social context, etc.) could jeopardize freedom, which is expected to be prior and preparatory to every kind of resolution. In recent accounts for philosophy of action is, therefore, crucial to understand freedom as alternative to causal explanation and as outcome of a process "involving an *internal* explanation in which the agent is *active* with respect to her own *goal*" (Yeomans 2012, p. 14). Although this frame of freedom as alternative to mechanical causation has been maintained by Hegel, his philosophy of agency represents a novel and in many regards resolute approach to this issue since it elucidates how free will can be conceived exclusively within the frame of social and institutionalized practices. In other words, one cannot have any freedom out of the intersubjective experience because the practical subjective dispositions are socially constituted. The problem of an internal explanation of the individual choice is consequently elucidated by giving an account of the fact that the agent is a social entity whose actions are public expression of her own internal motivations. Hegel underlines that freedom is social expression of individual purposiveness that can be fostered by adequate social practices, norms, laws and institutions. In this way, the problem of internal explanation can be eventually bypassed as the condition of being free is socially established and acknowledged.

Following him, the question about the compatibilism of will and motivation should be tackled by addressing the fact that every determination of will is a social and ethical matter and that out of this domain there is only room for perceptual or animal will. The crucial point of his analysis is based on the premise that originally will is just free and has no determination (*Bestimmung*) because, in the Hegelian logic, determination is the contrary of infinity, and freedom, as an universal concept, has to be infinite. As a matter of fact, any determination would produce the burdensome question whether a decision is free or imposed by an external power that sets up that specification of purpose. Since the determination of individual will is social and cannot be conceived as lonely and isolated, external determinism is for Hegel a problem issued by the normative context of the agent rather than by the more contemporary question about the independence of the from exogenous motivations (heteronomy). Hegelian compatibilism accounts for the constitution of human agency within social collaborative practices and for the legal aspects connected to it, therefore it is part of his wide conception of social freedom. Thus, Hegel's philosophy of action is based on the notion of expression not only because agency is self-expression (Yeomans 2012, 37), but rather because the agent publicly

expresses the principles and motivations of what makes an individual free (Yeomans 2012, 197–206).¹ In this sense, expression is causation and there is no place for further investigation about the nature of internal motivation as the question about the motives of a choice is absorbed by the expressive character of performing an action.

2

The *Philosophy of Right* essentially explains “the realm of actualized freedom” (Hegel *PR*, § 4) implicit in the the idea of right,² namely the historical condition of a community in which the individual members are not only free, but they are also able to establish social bonds and joint activities by remaining free and without exploitations or abuses. Consequently, the starting point of this investigation cannot be anything else than will, and more precisely

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- 1 Yeomans 2012, 37: “This is an assumption that connects an otherwise wide range of different views about agency, and so it is not surprising that it is a part of Hegel’s expressivist theory. Agency is self-expression for Hegel, and if the structure of expression is that of explanation then the structure of self-expression is a kind of self-explanation. Whatever must be done to make expression clear should therefore also make explanation clear in such a way that the two are of a piece and thus require no segregation (neither metaphysically nor in terms of fundamentally different social or interpretive practices).” Yeomans 2012, 199: “And Hegel is adamant that the appearances here are not just attributes, in which “the absolute shows only in one of its moments, a moment *presupposed* and picked up by *external reflection*” (WL393/SL554). Rather the relevant appearances are generated by the reflection of the absolute itself; the presupposition of the specific idea that is taken to be expressed must be an act of self-interpretation or reflection-into-self. I have done my best in chapters 7 and 8 to render this general line of thinking comprehensible and even plausible as a view about self-determination both generally and for human agents; the task now is to see how it works itself out in a causal vocabulary that is perhaps even more directly accessible to a contemporary reader. Hegel phrases the axis of the progression from mechanism to teleology in precisely these terms: mechanism is first understood as “an immediacy whose moments, by virtue of the totality of all the moments, exist in a self-subsistent indifference as *objects outside one another*” (WL12,132/SL710). Here already the very independence of the different elements is parasitic on their existence in the totality, and as Hegel puts it in the paragraphs following this quote, the progressive development through teleology deepens this internalization of the external precisely in order to give identity conditions for the elements, where these identity conditions turn out to involve the unity of the system as the end of the elements.”
- 2 Hegel *PR*, § 1: “The subject-matter of *the philosophical science of right* is the *Idea of right*—the concept of right and its actualization ... Addition: ... The Idea of right is freedom, and in order to be truly apprehended, it must be recognizable in its concept and in the concept’s existence [*Dasein*].”

individual will,³ as social freedom has to be logically traced back to the individual and personal condition. Purposiveness can be conceived as the natural prerequisite for developing the legal dimension in which individual action can be legitimate or not by means of the normative and political instrument represented by the right. Hence, without investigating it, it would not be possible to argument for a philosophical foundation of the right and of social institutions, as these require to be conceived as the concrete instrument for promoting and preserving freedom. In other words, the right does not only legitimate humans actions, activities and practices within a social and historical context, it also supplies us with a content or an external determination to individual will by establishing what is wrong and what is right. For Hegel, individual purposiveness is shaped by the norms and by the *ethos*, therefore the legitimacy itself of the right, namely its Idea, has to be grounded on the understanding of what a free will is.

Norms and rights are expected to promote free will although they also establish constraints against absolute individual freedom in order to preserve social order. The apparent paradox connected to this double function (promoting freedom by restricting it) is bypassed by arguing that absolute freedom is not concrete because it is a mere empty dissolution of every limitation (Hegel *PR*, § 5).⁴ The transition from absolute to determined freedom is what designates the person and represents the process in which the right can be legitimately introduced. In fact, the person is defined by means of a social process establishing what she is allowed to do in a normative sense. This renders both the constitution of a normative frame and the institution of the person as a willing, accountable and autonomous agent two consistent and parallel events, which are reciprocally influenced. In fact, determining the person as a willing subject means placing it within a normative frame determining what she is expected to do as a free agent by excluding actions and behaviors that are contrary to the common interest. In this way, the paradox of an absolute will that refuses any sort of limitation, even the normative one, can be avoided by introducing the notion of *determinate will*, which is eventually borne by the

3 Hegel *PR*, § 4: "The basis [*Boden*] of right is the *realm of spirit* in general and its precise location and point of departure is the *will*; the will is *free*, so that freedom constitutes its substance and destiny [*Bestimmung*] and the system of right is the realm of actualized freedom, the world of spirit produced from within itself as a second nature."

4 Hegel *PR*, § 5: "The will contains (a) the element of *pure indeterminacy* or of the "I" 's pure reflection into itself, in which every limitation, every content, whether present immediately through nature, through needs, desires, and drives, or given and determined in some other way, is dissolved; this is the limitless infinity of *absolute abstraction* or *universality*, the pure thinking of oneself".

person as a legal entity. The determination of the legal person is thus equivalent to the determination of the social and normative frame in which she is embedded and counts as an agent.

One of the most compelling aspects of this conception of normativity consists precisely in the fact that it is based on and justified through the analysis of individual purposiveness because the right necessarily affects it and cannot be legitimated unless it is connected to the natural source of the action itself represented by individual freedom. This provides firstly a naturalistic foundation to the elaboration of a legal system, but it also explains that social normativity and purposiveness are two faces of the same coin. As a matter of fact, the determination of the will (Hegel *PR* § 6), namely the moment in which the person is faced with the choice, is strictly related to the question of normativity and social rules, therefore there is no way in which it can be established separately from the intersubjective context. The boundary of individuality is, hence, the historical and concrete moment by which the individual makes a decision on the basis of norms representing that normative frame in which the historicity and sociality of the choice can be understood. Following Hegel, such limiting moment is a social fact, because the interpersonal relation suspends the one-sided character of abstract freedom and introduces to the concrete dimension of social and historical life.⁵

I previously maintained that Hegel's philosophy of action is naturalistic because the will stands for its natural premise, however it is necessary to underline that his inferential elaboration of this issue is very logical as will is a very abstract notion without any clear empirical reference. We know that human beings naturally have purposiveness,⁶ but we cannot define it as an empirical property because it is just a logical fact that we attribute resolution to their actions. Nonetheless, although resoluteness is not something that we can empirically observe (we cannot empirically state whether an action was willing or not), we presume the existence of some natural source of willingness

5 Hegel *PR*, § 6 [Addition]: "Then the third moment is that 'I' with itself in its limitation, in this other; as it determines itself, it nevertheless still remains with itself and does not cease to hold fast to the universal. This, then, is the concrete concept of freedom, whereas the two previous moments have been found to be thoroughly abstract and one-sided. But we already possess this freedom in the form of feeling [*Empfindung*], for example in friendship and love. Here, we are not one-sidedly within ourselves, but willingly limit ourselves with reference to an other, even while knowing ourselves in this limitation as ourselves. In this determinacy, the human being should not feel determined; on the contrary, he attains his self-awareness only by regarding the other as other. Thus, freedom lies neither in indeterminacy nor in determinacy, but it is both at once."

6 Hegel *PR*, § 11: "The will which is free as yet only *in itself* is the *immediate* or *natural* will."

arising before any external determination. In other words, the agent has purposiveness even before any possible instruction or education. Assuming that will originates independently from any external influence, namely that one individual has purposiveness independently from the object of will or from the motivations of striving for that object, means that there is a natural source of the capacity of willing that is bounded to the natural characteristics of the agent. However, the investigation about agency and free will has to follow a path that is methodologically connected to the logical aspects proper of the pragmatical questions related to the action. Since the natural agency of the individual, i.e. his or her natural capacity to make a decision, is an abstract capacity that has no content nor motivation, it cannot be further investigated. As we will see, it is a requisite that is natural because it distinguishes humans from animals that do not have any will,⁷ but once it has a content it must be investigated as a disposition necessarily connected to individual freedom, external determinisms, external or internal motivations, etc.

3

As we already mentioned, the will is a logical notion related to the constitution of human agency and it logically evolves from abstract absolute will into concrete and determined will. This transition also defines and limits the individual person as a legal and responsible subject integrated within some normative frame. This conversion is, according to Hegel, strongly intersubjective and historical, rather than a mere normative fact. In other words, what transforms the absolute will into a concrete one, i.e. into the purposiveness of a person striving for something, is not just the normative frame, but rather the simple relationship with other individual persons and the linked relational bounds (Hegel *PR*, § 6 *Addition*, see footnote 51). The normative is rather the outcome of the interpersonal relationships and of the need to normalize them through the constitution of social and institutionalized practices. In other word, the natural and

7 Hegel *PR*, § 4 [*Addition*]: "Addition (H,G)... The animal acts by instinct, it is impelled by something inward and is therefore al practical; but it has no will, because it does not represent to itself what it desires." See also Hegel *PR*, § 11: "Addition (H). The animal, too, has drives, desires, and inclinations, but it has no will and must obey its drive if nothing external prevents it. But the human being, as wholly indeterminate, stands above his drives and can determine and posit them as his own. The drive is part of nature, but to posit it in this "I" depends upon my will, which therefore cannot appeal to the fact that the drive is grounded in nature."

originative element of determinate will remains intersubjectivity, whereas the norms represent the abstraction of already existing joint and social activities. Sociality plays, indeed, an *enactive* role by suspending the one-sidedness of the absolute will and introducing the question of being free with another, i.e. by acknowledging the freedom of the other persons. This relational pressure is much stronger than the normative one, firstly because it is more concrete, but above all because normativity itself makes explicit in forms of principles what is implicit in the already given interpersonal practices.

Human agency is established, following Hegel, through a gradual process that can be explained as a logical unfolding of will having, as we mentioned above, three different steps. The first step is the pure indeterminacy originated in the pure reflection into itself of the individuality. In this step the will is absolute and every limitation is dissolved. This moment represents the logical premise and entails that freedom is the very original determination of purposiveness like, Hegel affirms, the weight is the basic determination of the body.⁸ In fact, the weight is not a contingent definition of the body, but rather its necessary and indispensable requisite (we cannot have a body without a weight). Similarly, we cannot have a will without freedom because “the will is free, so that freedom constitutes its substance and destiny” (Hegel *PR*, § 4). Given the logical and original connection between will and freedom, the will previously does not recognize any limitation, it is pure indeterminacy of purposiveness. Remarkably, Hegel identifies the absolute will to negative freedom, namely the sort of liberty that is exclusively realized in the absence of limitations or obstacles between the agent and her purpose. Many philosophers within the tradition of the empiricism like Thomas Hobbes and, more recently, Isaiah Berlin, associate liberty to this condition of absence of obstacles and sustain that there is no positive freedom. Hegel instead, defends a reflective conception of freedom in which the problem of total absence of hindrance is overcome by affirming that the determination itself of my will creates the question of impediment. Following him, the will is, therefore, the result of the existential character of subjectivity facing the present context and fostering its own freedom as an act of reflection (see also Honneth 2014, 21–41).

8 Hegel *PR*, § 4 [Addition]: “The freedom of the will can best be explained by reference to physical nature. For freedom is just as much a basic determination of the will as weight is a basic determination of bodies. If matter is described as heavy, one might think that this predicate is merely contingent; but this is not so, for nothing in matter is weightless: on the contrary, matter is weight itself. Heaviness constitutes the body and is the body ... Will without freedom is an empty word, just as freedom is actual only as will or as subject.”

The second step of this triadic dialectic of human agency's constitution is properly represented by the determination of purposiveness that occurs as particularization of the individual, namely "its step into existence [*Dasein*] in general—the absolute moment of the *finitude* or *particularization* of the 'I.'" (Hegel *PR*, § 6). Hegel underlines that this moment is relevant because it constitutes "the concept or substantiality of the will, its gravity, just as gravity constitutes the substantiality of the body" (Hegel *PR*, § 6 *Addition* H, G). Unlike the previous step, in this one will faces the concrete and existential domain in which freedom discovers that its own determination reflects its own limitation and the possibility of failure. The second step, as usual in the Hegelian dialectics, is the argumentative level in which the contradictions of reality are explained and unfolded; in the case of free will this moment represents the incompatibility between the concept itself of freedom and its concrete realization. It can be resolved just by overcoming the one-sided character of the purposiveness which is the result of the infinite character of the concept of itself proper of self-consciousness.

However, self-consciousness is also reflection about its own determinate existence and effort to remain consistent and identical with the concept of itself. The activity of self-consciousness in the practical domain is comparing the two constitutive elements of itself, namely the universality of the concept of itself and its own concrete and particular existence, and remaining itself in spite of possible contradictions. This remaining itself, conceived by Hegel as "remaining with itself [*bei sich*]" (Hegel *PR*, § 7) is what in this book we referred often as the speculative identity proper of mind, namely the disposition to preserve self-identification through the universal concept of itself despite the resistance of otherness. Hegel is indeed aware of the logical and speculative character proper of the constitution of agency, in fact he writes (Hegel *PR*, § 7):

But it is the third moment, the true and speculative (and everything true, in so far as it is comprehended, can be thought of only speculatively), which the understanding refuses to enter into, because the concept is precisely what the understanding always describes as incomprehensible. The task of proving and explaining in more detail this innermost insight of speculation—that is, infinity as self-referring negativity, this ultimate source of all activity, life, and consciousness—belongs to *logic* as pure speculative philosophy.

Human self-conscious agency and free will are therefore constituted by a reflection about the logical interdependence of concept, i.e. freedom, and existence, what Hegel defines in the previous passage as "the ultimate source of all

activity, life”; this overcomes the one-sidedness of absolute will and introduces the question about positive freedom, namely freedom in the concrete world. Then “the third moment is that ‘I’ is with itself in its limitation, in this other” (Hegel *PR*, § 7 *Addition*), in other words individual will is fixed by remaining itself in spite of the limitation of its own existence. This aspect has a relevant impact in Hegel’s theory of intersubjectivity since the interpersonal relations are shaped by means of this principle. In fact, they do not only represent an important existential limitation for the individual will, they also constitute the social frame shaping self-conscious life. In relationships like friendship and love we are not one-sidedly free, but rather we are free through and thank to those relations. Speculatively this can be explained by making recourse to the logical notion of “being with oneself” [*bei sich selbst zu sein*] which points out the condition of being free, namely autonomous from external determination or conditioning. Freedom within a relationship can be explained as the condition of “being with oneself in another” [*in einem Anderem bei sich selbst zu sein*], namely maintaining oneself through the relation with another.

As previously explained, Hegel’s conception of human agency and free will is radically connected to the question of the sociality of reason and self-conscious life whereas normativity is conceived as the outcome of interpersonal relationships. We can observe an unorthodox but still valid methodology of analysis that can potentially change the nowadays accepted approach to philosophy of action. In fact, in the contemporary studies the problem of a free agent is tackled by assuming that individual freedom is expected to be compatible with the norms regulating her actions and choices. However, this approach disregards the fact that normativity is tightly connected to and dependent from the intersubjective context in which the normative frame is established. Following Hegel instead, the very limitation to which the individual freedom is exposed is due to the coexistence of other individuals abiding by the similar logics of agency and purposiveness. In other words, the problem of compatibility is for him related to the intersubjective context in which other agents strive to bring about their own goals. The normative frame is, therefore, elaborated by giving an account for the conditions of intersubjective interaction and by establishing rules for a balanced society. The constitution of self-consciousness illustrated in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* already accounts for its intersubjective character and for the fact that the normative element just makes explicit the inferential structure of the dialectics of recognition. In the *Philosophy of Right* the same structure is replicated because the will is determined by means of the existential dimension of the subject, which is properly an intersubjective dimension. The normative is developed out of the necessity to regulate the reciprocal limitation and boundaries represented by the relationships with

other individual free agents. Norms can be, hence, conceived as endogenous to the agent as they originate within the community, which is constitutive for the subject. The problem of a will *compatible* to those norms can be, therefore, avoided because the latter are supposed to be steadily acknowledged by the subject as the subject is constituted by a process of integration into the intersubjective context. In fact, it represents a permanent self-regulating system in which the subject is both characterized and limited by means of the pressure exerted by the other participants' purposiveness. The necessary development of individual will from absolute freedom to existential or particular freedom is determined and shaped by the intersubjective context rather than by abstract moral normative principles.

4

As C. Yeomans (2012) efficaciously points out, Hegel's theory of human agency and free will is related with and shaped by his own conception of teleology and the inward character of causation in the teleological and living systems. This connection is based on the self-reflective conception Hegel has about human subjectivity, which leads him to affirm the potentially infinite character of both self-consciousness and its practical outcomes. As we saw in Chapters 1 and 2, self-consciousness is a notion articulated by means of two fundamental requisites, namely its infinite or universal nature based on self-representation and its determined and particular one which is centered instead on the fact that it is an existential entity operating in a real world. The first feature is what we can also call self-referentiality of self-consciousness, for it strives to put in place the conditions of both its own practical and cognitive sphere by assuming the universal and infinite character of the certainty of itself. The second characteristic is instead the result of the fact that self-conscious life has historical determination and is embedded in a temporal and defined context. This second feature is of course what affects it by externality, namely external conditioning that could jeopardize its own autonomy. External conditions are biased to determine the course and development of self-conscious life and to establish heteronomous rules of agency and purposiveness. This would contradict self-consciousness' independence, a crucial features. Since the unity of subject-object is properly the identity of the subject itself, the whole discourse about freedom should be understood by means of this speculative identity of the subject and its specific relationship to the object. This approach reconsiders the problem of human agency as a something related to the notion of self-referentiality of the agent, rather than to the notion of causation.

Following a traditional empiricist conception of subjectivity and free will, the subject can be conceived as free only if those external conditions do not represent an obstacle between the purpose and the goal. This conception obviously relies on a mechanical understanding of human agency considered as a simple cause of actions. Following this mechanical vision, an action is free exclusively when it is caused by the subject and no external cause intervenes to influence the choice. However, this theory generates the problem that even a free choice can be motivated by external factors like cultural and educative beliefs that can causally influence the decision. From a mechanical conception of the action there is indeed no way to escape the problem connected to the external determinism because mechanism, as Hegel maintains, is intrinsically affected by externality and cannot be conceived as the *truth of the question related to the cause*.⁹ Mechanical connection entails an extrinsic relationship between cause and effect that cannot be defined as a substantial change of the world conditions nor one can state that any kind of free agent is in play in this situation. In order to figure out free action we have to presuppose a purposive connection, namely a subject that does something purposively. However, this kind of connection should be based on a self, i.e. on an entity having some sort of self-reference, in order to be autonomous. In this case we would have an agent establishing an intrinsic relation to her action by conceiving of it as something substantially produced by and belonging to herself. Of course, also mechanism implies some sort of production because the effect is the product of the cause, however the cause-effect relation is possible because of the reference to an external entity (the cause), therefore they are conceived as two distinct phenomena. If we instead suppose the existence of an autonomous agent, her actions should be regarded as the direct production of her autonomous will, which is intrinsically connected to the teleology entailed in her

9 Hegel *SL*, 651–652: “...the objective world exhibits mechanical and final causes; its actual existence is not the norm of *what is true*, but *what is true* is rather the criterion for deciding which of these concrete existences is its true one. Just as the subjective understanding exhibits also errors in it, so the objective world exhibits also aspects and stages of truth that by themselves are still one-sided, incomplete, and only relations of appearances. If mechanism and purposiveness stand opposed to each other, then by that very fact they cannot be taken as *indifferent* concepts, as if each were by itself a correct concept and had as much validity as the other, the only question being *where* the one or the other may apply. This equal validity of the two rests only on the fact that they *are*, that is to say, that *we have them both*. But since they do stand opposed, the necessary first question is, which of the two concepts is the true one; and the higher and truly telling question is, *whether there is a third which is their truth, or whether one of them is the truth of the other*. —But *purposive connection* has proved to be the truth of *mechanism*.”

capacity to make decisions. As Yeomans (2012) rightly claims, Hegel's philosophy of agency is strictly connected to his logics and particularly to his notion of teleology in which the perspective of causation is turned towards the internal connection between agent and action by virtue of the notion of purpose. This notion gives an account of the intrinsic character of self-referentiality proper of the teleological systems and of all living organisms; it suspends the externality proper of mechanical causation and establishes a system of internal causation described through what we call the final end of an organism. Previously we tackled the question of self-referentiality proper of biological organisms and explained that self-consciousness is substantially a form of life that shares with other living organisms this kind of self-reference and self-closure. In the ambit of philosophy of action an agent is also organized by means of internal purposiveness and self-reference and her acts are determined in a similar autonomous way. More precisely, we can state that the action is the autonomous expression of an internally established organizational principle which is the product of self-reflection proper of self-conscious beings. In this way, we can avoid the problem linked to both will as mere cause of the action and the mechanical conception of the agency, and we can state that there is a teleological and self-reflective principle in play in the determination of the purposiveness. Moreover, the fact that an action is conceived as expression of an internal production reinforces the idea that freedom is a social matter because it is encapsulated in the normative and legal frame of a society, which guarantees a fair interaction and balance between single agents.

5

Which are the consequences of this expressive philosophy of action for our understanding of human agency? As I already mentioned before, the main consequence is avoiding to explain the connection between will and action in a mechanical or causal way; many modern accounts of free agency conceive of action as something simply caused by something else that can be either dependent or independent from the agent. Take for example the case of a choice based on a motivation that has a cultural, familiar or historical conditioning: in this case the agent cannot be conceived as totally independent because her motivation is rooted on an exogenous ground. In fact, every mechanical explanation has to deal with the problem of *regressus ad infinitum* of the cause since it is not logically possible to pinpoint a cause which in turn is not caused by another one. In contrast to this methodology, Hegel's approach is completely different as he claims that causation is essentially *expression* [*Entäußerung*] of

a principle that is intrinsically elaborated in the ambit of the activity that produces the effect.¹⁰ This obviously depends on the inward character of the concept by which we understand the relations of dependence proper of the events we experience. The concept explains and grasps a relation between two phenomena, like the cause and its effect, by means of a principle that is intended as implicit in the causal connection. In other words, the relation between cause and effect that we observe is nothing else than the expression of this principle that we understand in the form of a concept or a physical law. This is much more valid for a purposiveness or production of actions involving an autonomous agent that is not affected by externality thank to the self-referentiality proper of her nature. This kind of agent is in charge for the elaboration of the principle at the bottom of her action and the action itself should not be taken for a separate effect. The action is instead the expression of an internal principle proper of the agent that is existent on its own account and is made explicit through actions and practices. This also highlights the fact that an action has an ownership what has many legal and juridical consequences. On the contrary, a principle that is not expressed in an action is empty of concreteness and actuality and remains in the reign of pure abstraction and hypothesis and has no relevance in defining agency and agency's accountability.

Summing up, the agent is accountable for an action so far as she is in charge for the *principle* at the bottom of the action itself, because producing an action for a rational agent means expressing and bringing into existence a principle, what has more teleological than mechanical implications. In fact, the principle itself is a product of self-reflection about one own's ends and this becomes the instrument for distinguishing what is wrong from what is right and for making the right decision and carrying on the right action. However, this principle is inward and unless it is brought into actuality by some externalization it remains mere abstraction. Thus, expression is a very important notion closely related to those of actuality and teleology. In Hegel's

10 Hegel *EL*, § 148: "The *activity* is (α) likewise existent on its own account, independently (a man, a character); and at the same time it has its possibility only in the conditions and in the matter [itself]; (β) it is the movement of translating the conditions into the matter, and the latter into the former as the side of existence; more precisely [it is the movement] to make the matter [itself] go forth from the conditions, in which it is *implicitly* present, and to give existence to the matter by sublating the existence that the conditions have. Insofar as these three moments have the shape of *independent existence* vis-à-vis one another, this process is *external* necessity. —This necessity has a *restricted* content as its matter. For the matter [itself] is this whole in *simple* determinacy; but since the whole is external to itself in its form, it is also inwardly and in its content external to itself, and this externality belonging to the matter is the restriction of its content."

philosophy of action the notion of *expression* [*Entäußerung*] supplies us with a straightforward conception of agency as something that generates an action by expressing a principle, which mirrors the reflection on one's own real existence [*Dasein*]. This fosters a revision of compatibilism as it underlines that an action is not simply "caused" by some agency, but rather it results to be the externalization of some internal principle of freedom that can be socially evaluated. In fact, many issues connected to compatibilism originate in the presumption that an action has to be somehow caused by something separated (the agent, agent's beliefs, agent's social context, etc.). However, this approach resembles a mechanistic outlook of action causation that completely disregards the possibility of actions as expressions of principles autonomously elaborated. A revision of the theory of will as bare cause of an action is possible thanks to Hegel who, like Kant, emphasizes the fact that freedom is *substance-production*, namely the power of breaking the mechanical concatenation of the natural phenomena by becoming author of principles autonomously yielded.

Hegel evolves this concept that we already notice in Kantian philosophy in order to supply us with a straightforward and more complete conception of human agency that also deals with its social, intersubjective and normative implications. The notion of *expression as causation* is theoretically strictly connected to the notion of actuality, which represents a crucial point of the entire Hegelian logic and it is defined as "the unity, become immediate, of essence and existence, or of what is inner and what is outer" (Hegel *EL*, § 142). The importance of this notion is due to the fact that it connects the historical and practical character of existence (the outer) to the substantial nature of essence (the inner) by highlighting that the identity of these terms represents freedom as "truth of necessity" (Hegel *EL*, § 158). The process of causation is, therefore, strictly connected to the need to assure unity to essence and existence and to produce actuality, namely to bring into existence a principle that has the ontological status and task of indicating the final end for the practical agent. Whereas a practical principle is inferentially articulated and explicitly elaborated within the theoretical domain, in the ambit of action it is just expressed in the form of an equivalent act. This indicates that the inferential nature of human rationality is crucial also for practical philosophy in which an act inferentially follows a principle and results to be concrete extension of that principle itself. Moreover, expression is the notion that better identifies this process as it indicates something that from inward comes outward changing external conditions and reality. Kant's practical philosophy is also concerned to illustrate the actuality of moral action as it is expected to bring into existence the categorical imperative which represents the a-priori law for human agency.

However, Kant does not give an account of the practical subject as an existential entity embedded in a practical and historical context.

Hegel, in contrast, claims that the human agent is integrally and concretely embedded in the evolution of the pragmatic, historical, legal and social surrounding, and consequently he underlines the importance to conceive of an action as an extrication of an internal principle. What makes an agent free is not being independent from any external influence, but rather the capacity to explicate the internal and teleological principles of its existence. There is a substantial change of perspective in Hegel's philosophy of action that is connected to his positive concept of freedom as self-mastery. Following the empirical tradition, freedom is possible when the condition of absence of obstacles between the individual purpose and the object is fulfilled. This is a negative conception that underlines the necessity that external conditions are satisfied in order that an agent can be free. According to Hegel instead, freedom is based on self-mastery, a condition in which the subject is free because of her independence from external conditionings and because of her capacity to get rid of any form of heteronomous power. This implies that the free agent abides by principles that are expression of giving oneself the law, what is sustained by the inferential articulation of one's own reason. Human agency could not be rightly understood without addressing the fundamental disposition of justifying and defending one's own point of view through committive practices of giving and asking for reasons within a social space (Brandom 2000). This kind of practices leads to the assessment of what is right by virtue of the acceptance of an authoritative reason that has a social status, rather than by the empirical scrutiny of external conditions. This idealistic position fosters a conception of free will that is centered on the inferential character of the principles determining the purpose, rather than on the presumption that the will is the extension of desires and subjective drives.

In contrast, according to philosophers like Hume our intentional faculty is profoundly shaped by the emotional structure of our subjectivity, what can be empirically observed and what defines our will as longing and craving disposition. This approach has several consequences in the empiricist theory of agency that is highly represented by Hume's thought. According to him, human will just faces the empirical demands of the ego on one side and the empirical conditions of the external world on the other side, what brings to the consequent empirical evaluation and assessment about the concrete feasibility of one's own purpose. Although this approach remains in the pure terrain of empirical estimation, it reveals to be very poor in what concerns the formation of the individual purposiveness, which is merely described as a subjectivity imprisoned by both its own drives and longings and by the incapacity to fulfill

them because of the empirical constraints originating in the independent reality. Hegel's reflection, in contrast, is a straightforward analysis on the reflective disposition of the self-conscious subject about her own practical reasons and the surroundings. It supplies us with a conception of human agency as an inferential activity based on the determination of will through the acceptance of the historical and social conditions in which the subject is integrated. Since Hegel explains the determination of agency by going beyond the contradictions caused by what he calls absolute will, he explores the possibility for an existential agent, which belongs to the historical *Dasein* of subjectivity. The universal character of the former, for which freedom and will are the same, is necessarily contained in the existential and determinate nature of the latter, in which freedom has a content that is decided by the principle of authoritative reason. Hume's conception is affected by the empiricist need (and obsession) to specify human purposiveness as strongly connected to an empirical agent subjected to empirical drives and necessities, acting in an empirical world with empirical obstacles and constraints. Moreover, Hume does not differentiate the absolute will from the existential one and handles human purposiveness as a mere observational disposition. This substantially depends on the fact that Hume totally disregards the logical aspects connected to the constitution of purposiveness and to the elaboration of decision, whereas he only accounts for the empirical elements connected to the agent (desires, needs, emotions, material conditions, etc.).

For Hegel instead, what matters is exploring the logical elements connected to the constitution itself of agency, like how the difference between absolute and determinate will operates in the choice. For instance, absolute will is void of content because it negates every determination and understands reality as mere limitation as it only has feelings of its own existence.¹¹ It is a mere logical category by which we understand purposiveness as the opposite of external conditioning, however it does not explain how it unfolds in the concrete existence of a subject. Existential will is instead given by an agent positing herself as a limited existence and, simultaneously, preserving the universal ideal of freedom as absence of external mastery.¹² Although this discourse implies that

11 Hegel *PR*, § 5: "Only *one aspect* of the will is defined here [The will as *pure indeterminacy*, author's note]—namely this *absolute possibility* of *abstracting* from every determination in which I find myself or which I have posited in myself, the flight from every content as a limitation ... This is the freedom of the void, which is raised to the status of an actual shape and passion ... Only in destroying something does this negative will have a feeling of its own existence [*Dasein*]."

12 Hegel *PR*, § 7: "The will is the unity of both these moments—*particularity* reflected *into itself* and thereby restored to universality. It is *individuality* [*Einzelheit*], the

freedom as an universal condition belongs to the realm of possibility, it also promotes the principle that the content of freedom is established by the dialectical evolution of oneself within the historical and social context in which limitation is what shapes the agent itself. Freedom for the agent is, hence, like the gravity for the body, they belong each other per definition and they cannot be given separately. The identity of self-consciousness is, thus, shaped by the definition of will through the limitations of one's own existence, what makes a self-conscious subject a bearer of reasons, rather than of mere drives. Since we cannot understand will without freedom like we cannot understand the body without the gravity, freedom represents the ideal of will but also its concrete problem. Will has to face the limitation of the world as limitations of its own freedom but also as the opportunity to concretely determine its own liberty. The reciprocal dependence of freedom and will is what shapes human agency as a concrete entity embedded in an existential world and what, eventually, indicates the extension or possibility itself of being free. Defining a practical subject means, therefore, defining an existential entity embedded in a context in which her own freedom is at stake. This subject will determines her will on the basis of the existential conditions and by defining practical principles that will be expressed by concrete actions. Moreover, these principles are collectively scrutinized in order to provide individual will will normative and legal conditions for being free.

6

As we already mentioned, the *Philosophy of Right* is thus devoted to address the question concerning the possibility of freedom in the legal sphere of the State in which both individual liberties and common interests are expected to be preserved. His theory of agency and individual will represents the philosophical foundation for his philosophy of right since the legal and normative frames are the expression of human disposition to freedom and social freedom.

self-determination of the 'I', in that it posits itself as the negative of itself, that is, as *determinate* and *limited*, and at the same time remains with itself [*bei sich*], that is, in its *identity with itself* and universality; and in this determination, it joins together with itself alone. —'I' determines itself in so far as it is the self-reference of negativity. As this *reference to itself*, it is likewise indifferent to this determinacy; it knows the latter as its own and as *ideal*, mere *possibility* by which it is not restricted but in which it finds itself merely because it posits itself in it. —This is the *freedom* of the will, which constitutes the concept or substantiality of the will, its gravity, just as gravity constitutes the substantiality of a body."

The normative and legal frame of human laws is what directly concerns human freedom as it provides us with the regulation of human agency in an institutional and shared way. We can state that for Hegel freedom has to be assured by the institution by virtue of a process in which individual liberties are harmonically integrated for preserving the community. What he describes in his *Philosophy of Right* is the development of institutions expected to protect human free agency by also determining it. In order to avoid the possible conflict between individual and common interests, Hegel directly addresses the question of the formation of the single citizen rather than the question concerning the mediation of conflicts as Hobbes does. Whereas the latter assesses the impossibility of disciplining individual interests without a sovereign institution to which citizens transfer their power for mediating interpersonal disputes and competition, Hegel's strategy aims rather at establishing a solid agreement between individual citizens and State based on the edification of a good citizen. He promotes, therefore, a model of legal and normative frame that does not exert any constraint because this would jeopardize the model of freedom he is seeking. He rather maintains that a State should pervade any form of practical and productive social life and operate for sake of the preservation of interpersonal activities by supplying their participants with a legal and normative apparatus. The reason why he claims that the State law *permeates* all relations within the State itself is because he also affirms that the constitution of a nation depends on the nature of its own self-consciousness.¹³

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- 13 Hegel *PR*, § 274: "Since spirit is actual only as that which it knows itself to be, and since the state, as the spirit of a nation [*Volk*], is both the law which *permeates all relations within it* and also the customs and consciousness of the individuals who belong to it, the constitution of a specific nation will in general depend on the nature and development [*Bildung*] of its self-consciousness; it is in this self-consciousness that its subjective freedom and hence also the actuality of the constitution lie ... *Addition*: The constitution of a state must permeate all relations within it. Napoleon, for example, tried to give the Spanish a constitution *a-priori* but the consequences were bad enough. For a constitution is not simply made: it is the work of centuries, the Idea and consciousness of the rational (in so far as that consciousness has developed in a nation). No constitution can therefore be created purely subjectively [*von Subjekten*]. What Napoleon gave to the Spanish was more rational than what they had before, and yet they rejected it as something alien, because they were not yet sufficiently cultivated [*gebildet*]. The constitution of a nation must embody the nation's feeling for its rights and [present] conditions otherwise it will have no meaning or value, even if it is present in an external sense. Admittedly, the need and longing for a better constitution may often be present in individuals [*Einzelnen*], but for the entire mass [of people] to be filled with such an idea [*Vorstellung*] is quite another matter, and this does not occur until later. Socrates' principle of morality or inwardness was a necessary product of his age, but it took time for this to become [part of] the universal self-consciousness."

Therefore, a State as the supreme national institution does not disregard any part of the society and of the life within itself, and it is requested to be present in every form of the cultural and biological existence of its own citizens. This does not necessarily mean that the State exerts an authoritarian and despotic power over its own citizens, because its power when it is legitimated is also endogenous, i.e. expression of the nation itself. Hegel's strategy to link the legal authority of State to the ethical and practical life of a nation (and also to its productive, economical, industrial and commercial activities) entails the justification itself of this authority because it can be regarded as the institutional expression of the national spirit of.

The anti-dualistic Hegelian methodology has many positive consequences also in his philosophy of right: rather than delineating an external and exogenous legal power based on the mediation of individual interests, he prefers to conceive of the conduct of State as expression of the ethical substance of a nation. He conceives of a nation as a natural entity, namely a natural group of individuals and families that share a common language, common habits, practices and ethical values and that are associated by means of a common destiny. This conception of nation is naturalistic and connected to the very basilar and naturalistic notion of people or folk [*das Volk*]. The State becomes the institutional expression of this communality and is the result of a process in which the will of this natural community can be institutionally established and preserved by founding a legal and unitarian collective entity. Therefore, the State is a matter of spirit, namely it concerns the ethical life and existence of a community and it promotes its preservation by means of a lasting institutional and legal power. It represents the actuality of the ethical Idea of a nation, namely the identification of its essence and existence and, consequently, it stands for its concrete and ethical life.¹⁴ We can observe in this narrative the deployment of the same logical methodology of expressivism in which a phenomenon (the State) is considered as the mature explication of something that naturally underlies (the nation).

14 Hegel *PR*, § 257: "The state is the actuality of the ethical Idea—the ethical spirit as substantial will, *manifest* and clear to itself, which thinks and knows itself and implements what it knows in so far as it knows it. It has its immediate existence [*Existenz*] in *custom* and its mediate existence in the *self-consciousness* of the individual [*des Einzelnen*], in the individual's knowledge and activity, just as self-consciousness, by virtue of its disposition, has its *substantial freedom* in the state as its essence, its end, and the product of its activity. The *Penates* are the inner and *lower* gods, and the *spirit of the nation* (Athene) is the divine which *knows* and *wills* itself. *Piety* is feeling [*Empfindung*] and ethical life governed by feeling, and *political virtue* is the willing of that thought end which has being in and for itself."

Differently from Hobbes, Hegel refuses any kind of description that implies a contraposition between State and citizens; he sustains that both law and right originate in the practical and concrete dimension of society and emerge as outcome of making this dimension explicit in the form of normative. Whereas for Hobbes society is the causal premise for the State as it pushes for the creation of an institution in charge of mediating interpersonal conflicts, Hegel conceives of the nation as the natural aggregation from which the State emerges as explication of underlying ethical principles and associate life. The State is consequently the realization or actualization, by means of a legal institution, of an ethical Idea, namely of the conceptual essence of the practical and productive life of an already existing group of people. By virtue of this explicative description, in which it is depicted as outcome of something previously existing, the contrapositions entailed in Hobbes' view can be avoided and a sort of continuity between general will and individual will can be fostered. According to Hobbes, the Leviathan emerges as result of a transfer of power from the society to an institutional and powerful body, which is necessary to terminate the interpersonal disputes and conflicts among citizens. However, this institutional body is conceived as extraneous to civil society and as its almighty master and ruler. Because of his pessimistic conception of the human beings, Hobbes is not able to affirm a real continuity between the power of the Leviathan and the citizens, who are practically considered powerless once they transfer the power to the legal State. They are able to pursue personal interests but the public sphere of decision is considerably emptied and devoid of participation. Such absence of continuity between the private and the public, and between the individual liberties and the general will, implies that many aspects of the social contract cannot be explained like, for instance, the realization of the individual freedom through the conduct of the State. In other words, the interdependence between personal liberties and State's sovereignty in Hobbes's Leviathan is not fully explained because these two aspects are treated as distinct. This outlook assumes the mistrust towards the individual citizens as the main perspective and attitude of the institutional bodies.

Hegel, in contrast, pursues a very different conception of general will that he considers as the expression itself of individual liberties, namely as outcome of the explication of already existing practices that he calls ethical life. The ethical life evolves and becomes explicit through the establishment of a legal and institutional body that has the power to implement and defend the personal liberties by enforcing its own sovereignty. Therefore, Hegel describes a symmetrical proportion between the sovereignty of a State and the freedom of its citizens and highlights their reciprocal dependence. This is the result of his conception that causation is expression, i.e. making explicit inferential

reasons and practices by means of an object, in this case an institutional body, which is able to better develop and promote them. Consequently, the State does not emerge from ethical life just because the latter causes the former, but rather because the former is expression of the latter, namely it represents its *actuality* or spirit (Hegel *PR* § 257). This outlook remarkably strengthens the Hegelian notion of individual freedom as it renders it possible even in the political and public sphere. Since the legitimacy of State is not based on a public agreement but rather on the explication of the ethical life in the form of an institution, the former is supposed to be explicit expression of what is already implicit in the latter. There is, hence, no possible discrepancy created by the contractualist methodology in which the agreement among individuals and the State has the form of a private acceptance or endorsement. This methodology entails a fragmentary conception of the role, the power and the limits of the State and it leaves unsolved many aspects linked to the political life like, for example, the distribution of public duties, commitments, entitlements, rights and oughts. In other words, the contractualist approach remains based on the contraposition between a public body and the private persons and organizations, and the risk of one-sidedness is not avoided. In contrast, following Hegel, as we already mentioned, there is a substantial continuity between the practical sphere and the institutional one and the freedom of the individuals is perfectly legitimated by the power itself of the State.

Moreover, he also states that there cannot be any freedom outside the State because only within this institutional living dimension the concrete ethical life of a nation or Volk can be realized. Since the ethical substance is the normative essence of human individual agency, individual freedom cannot be realized without adhering to it. However, it can be only actualized by means of the institutional civic body conceived as the legal and interpersonal sphere that legitimates the ethical substance of nation by explicating it in the form of rights, duties, oughts and entitlements.¹⁵ The distinctive characteristic of

15 Hegel *PR*, § 260: "The state is the actuality of concrete freedom. But *concrete freedom* requires that personal individuality [*Einzelheit*] and its particular interests should reach their full *development* and gain *recognition of their right* for itself (within the system of the family and of civil society), and also that they should, on the one hand, *pass over* of their own accord into the interest of the universal, and on the other, knowingly and willingly acknowledge this universal interest even as their own *substantial spirit*, and *actively pursue it* as their *ultimate end*. The effect of this is that the universal does not attain validity or fulfilment without the interest, knowledge, and volition of the particular, and that individuals do not live as private persons merely for these particular interests without at the same time directing their will to a universal end [*in und für das Allgemeine wollen*] and acting in conscious awareness of this end. The principle of modern states has enormous

the modern State is not to foster freedom in accordance to subjective caprices or individualistic drives and compulsions because this would lead us back to the Hobbesian conception that the public body has exclusively to deal with personal interests. As we saw, the determination of individual will represents the moment by which individual agency is shaped as a concrete entity facing a concrete reality, and this is possible by superseding the absolute will as negation of every obstacle. This determination is possible by virtue of the universal concept of self-conscious life as something embedded in an ethical sphere, namely in an interpersonal context in which values and principles are socially acknowledged. Consequently, the State does not care about the “subjective caprice” (Hegel *PR*, § 260 *Addition*), but rather it focuses on the ideal form of citizenship that can be obtained by determining individual will as above mentioned. The advantage of this approach is to establish an harmonious and conciliated relationship between the legal authority and the individual citizens as the latter are supposed to belong to the ethical life that is at the very bottom of every public authority. Therefore, the explication of an ethical principle by means of the State is what assures that a sort of continuity between executive power and civil society can provide for an enduring cohesion between individual and general will.

7

Although many philosophers of politics highlight that Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* is a book confined to an ethical conception of legality, it still represents, I believe, a valid investigation upon the nature of human normativity because it affirms the principle that law is strictly connected to human free agency and that it is expected to promote individual freedom within the social context. The main Hegelian concern in this book is not just providing an ethical justification for the institutional power and for the law, but rather to explain the legal sphere as the explication of dispositions and attitudes that are naturally connected to the human purposiveness. The notion of explication is surely crucial for this aim as it accounts for the necessary continuity between the particular dimension of individual will and the general will proper of legal institutions. The latter results to be the explicit outcome of what is supposed to be already affirmed in former. Hegel does not conceive of right as the outcome of

strength and depth because it allows the principle of subjectivity to attain fulfilment in the *self-sufficient extreme* of personal particularity, while at the same time *bringing it back to substantial unity* and so preserving this unity in the principle of subjectivity itself.”

a contractual agreement among citizens that should end the state of nature, but rather he highlights its connection to the ethical dimension. This strategy has the advantage to underline the concrete nature of the legal system because it points out that it emerges from a real and living dimension of already existing and conventionalized social relationships. The contractualist approach instead conceives of the State as the result of a mere agreement what does not account for the pervasiveness of public institutions and laws in our lives. In other words, it supplies us with a very abstract conception that does not address either its effectiveness in determining our practices and relations or the concrete connection it has with the civil society, namely the spontaneous dimension of the human interconnection.

Explaining legal authority as the explication and legitimization of already existing practices is a very good solution for avoiding the limit of contractualism and for understanding how it pervades practical life. Ethical life does not just represent the practical sphere dictating what has to be done and what has to be prohibited, but rather it consists in the social space of behaviors and certainties that are collectively acknowledged and scrutinized. This space plays a fundamental role in determining individual will and in overcoming the phase of absolute freedom, namely the destructive and originary form of purposiveness that refuses external determination and coercion. According to Hegel, any self-conscious disposition requires an explicit content that can be shared because it fosters the definition of the person. In order to fulfill the requirements of obtaining contents for our will that defines us as social and self-conscious beings, we establish an ethical dimension, namely the intersubjective and practical sphere in which our form of life can be explicitly determined. Exclusively in this space we are able to shape the life in terms of practical life what characterizes the natural dimension of our species (M. Thompson 2008). The ethical dimension has, thus, the role to set up the human interconnections in terms of norms and principles what eschews an understanding of will in terms of mere negation of obstacles. It rather promotes a vision of human purposiveness as something that is shaped both within and by means of an already given normative frame and personal interaction. Obviously, this frame determines the terms by which individual freedom can be achieved, namely by being acknowledged as a member of the community, and this radically changes the idea of freedom as simple absence of obstacles. We can state, hence, that for Hegel the only obstacle for the attainment of freedom is the absence of integration in a society in which freedom is awarded to its members, namely a dysfunctional society that is based on mere control and authority. This issue will be addressed in the next chapter.

Normativity and Freedom

1

Freedom is the central topic of German classical philosophy, which deals with the question about the possibility of being free not just *in compliance with*, but rather *by virtue of* the norms. There is a huge difference between these two ways of attaining freedom. The former necessarily abides by some practical principles or rules but it does not conceive of them as the *only* instrument for freedom, whereas the latter self-consciously assesses that specific norms are the only and very principles for being truly free. In addition, we have to address the wider philosophical question about the relation between a norm, which is *external* and *ontologically independent from the agent*, and freedom, which is instead per definition *a subjective condition of independence from external conditionings*. Therefore, the fundamental question we have to tackle in this chapter is properly whether there can be any sort of free agency that is expected to abide by norms and principles independent from the agent herself. The second aspect to be addressed is connected to self-conscious compliance and if this can be a requisite of freedom.

A norm is universally conceived and socially acknowledged, it is independent from particular and contextual conditions and can be applied to several and different situations, whereas human agency is defined through a specific historical context what might undermine the possibility of applying any universal norm for making a decision over an action. Individual freedom cannot be guaranteed, hence, by the simple norm unless it is acknowledged by every individual agent that accepts it as a principle of conduct. Kant has the merit of pinpointing that the problem of freedom and normativity is connected to the apparently external and independent character of norm and of successfully individuating a principle of conduct that is self-evident, i.e. the categorical imperative. This principle holds self-evidence what forces the agent to rationally acknowledge its universal character and to self-consciously endorse it. Kant has been able to develop a strategy for eschewing the problem of freedom as result of following an heteronomous principle and to rely the source of decision on the self-conscious capacity of self-legislation. This capacity is conceived as the reflective capacity of the subject of autonomously establishing a set of norms of conduct universally valid, namely not subjected to particular interests and needs. In other words, Kant tackles the question about

preserving both the universal character of the moral norm and the autonomy of the subject in order to combine individual freedom with the universal validity of the principles of conduct. In order to achieve this equilibrium, he unveils that the self-conscious subject can be the source of normativity provided that the elaboration of any principle is free from external conditionings and influences. Kant's contribution has been enormous because he pointed out the possibility to bind freedom and moral law by understanding the latter as the source itself of the former. This approach completely mutates our comprehension of human agency because it highlights the fact that a free agent is merely expected to express through actions a principle that she discovers a-priori, namely by means of an internal and self-conscious deductive research of an universal practical judgment.

Whenever one discusses about normativity in German classical philosophy Kant's contribution should be considered crucial for solving the puzzle about self-determination. As Honneth rightly states, following Kant "humans are free precisely because they can obey the moral laws they have imposed upon themselves" (Honneth 2014, 32–33). However, Kant's transcendental approach has been challenged and weakened by several commentators that disagreed with him about the correctness and efficacy of transcendental methodology. As well-known, transcendentalism in philosophy implies some issues concerning the possibility itself of defining the subject or agent in historical, concrete and actual terms since it merely explains the transcendental conditions for judgment. Such conditions are meant to be universally valid in a way that is similar to the mathematical truth, namely by means of the principle of evidence. The truth of the categorical imperative has to be acknowledged by a rational subject, and this is a transcendental condition for its validity, in a way that it is totally independent from the historical, empirical, concrete context in which this subject is embedded. This undermines the possibility to shed light on the notion itself of self-determination that can hardly be explained from a transcendental perspective, since it occurs in the concrete and historical situation.

Consequently, as Honneth (2014, 34) points out, Kant's transcendental concept of self-determination has been challenged by both an empirical reinterpretation and an inter-subjectivist correction. The former is represented mostly by Freud and Piaget and by their attempt to empirically observe the emergence in the child of a moral understanding of the interpersonal situation. The latter instead consists in giving an account of the communicative and intersubjective sphere in which a moral judgment is discussed, articulated and defended what implies a revision of the conditions themselves of its evidence. In fact, for people like Apel, Habermas and Brandom every propositional statement requires to be scrutinized by the community by means of

an argumentative practice that Brandom calls *game of giving and asking for reasons*. This social scrutiny becomes the condition itself for the validity of a norm, condition that is not transcendental, namely based on a deductive methodology, but rather concrete and historical because it relies on discursive practices of those who are subjected to the norms themselves that they discuss.

Both revisions aim at understanding self-determination as a requisite that one can attain in a concrete ambit rather than by the simple acknowledgment of a norm. They also try to skip the issues proper of transcendentalism by pinpointing a practical and concrete domain in which rational conditions of normativity can be investigated as concretely endorsed by historical agents, rather than by mere transcendental subjects. Kant himself states that concretely obeying the categorical imperative makes us able to define the subject as a *noumenon* rather than as a simple transcendental subject, namely to conceive of the moral subject as an ontological agent operating in and belonging to a real, historical and social dimension.¹ He, hence, assesses that the moral action as something decided by a principle autonomously elaborated changes our understanding of the moral subject that can be conceived as a real entity, rather than as a simple transcendental condition for elaborating judgments. He was aware of the fact that dealing with the moral subject means accounting for her nature of being an agent that operates and effectively changes the world, whose self-determination is real and not a simple question of autonomous self-legislation. Although he was not able to further investigate the social conditions in which the normative fact of moral legislation can be fully implemented, as we will see, he gives some interesting clues representing the starting point for following reflections.

2

Within the philosophical tradition of German classical philosophy Kant's practical thought is crucial because of three important results: 1) putting

1 Kant *GMM*, 57: "As a rational being, and thus as a being belonging to the intelligible world, the human being can never think of the causality of his own will otherwise than under the idea of freedom; for, independence from the determining causes of the world of sense (which reason must always ascribe to itself) is freedom. With the idea of freedom the concept of *autonomy* is now inseparably combined, and with the concept of autonomy the universal principle of morality, which in idea is the ground of all actions of *rational beings*, just as the law of nature is the ground of all appearances."

the focus on the practical and social character of the individual person, 2) acknowledging that individual freedom cannot be given out of a discourse about some universal and moral law and, finally, 3) extending the interest towards the empirical and social conditions by which a community of moral individual persons attains liberty and self-determination. In fact, Kant himself was aware that the discovery of the categorical imperative had important consequences on social philosophy and on the possibility to evolve a community of persons free because completely ruled by this principle. However, philosophers after him investigated the requisites for a free society and for free politics by avoiding those issues connected to a transcendental methodology, which does not account for the historical conditions because it relies on hypothetical premises.

Herder, Fichte and Hegel, among the others, were not interested in conceiving of freedom as something regarding single persons, but rather as something that can be fostered within the community and that is connected to the historical and institutional advancement of the society. They were actually right to highlight that norms are principles whose validity and evidence is connected to a social scrutiny and acceptance, rather than to the bare individual and solipsistic elaboration. Moreover, freedom itself cannot be attained in the abstract context of transcendental legislation, it has to be rather actualized within the concrete existence of the agent. Indeed, the fact that a rational being can rationally bear the ratification of a moral principle and recognize its evidence is not a sufficient condition for affirming that she is free in her concrete existence. Freedom requires rather to be fostered by a normative frame that is socially elaborated and evaluated by means of intersubjective practices and institutions. The question becomes a matter of social freedom, namely the normative and social historical condition in which individual liberty is defended and promoted. What philosophers after Kant try to preserve is the fundamental Kantian intuition that an agent can only be free if she has to obey a norm that she herself has autonomously elaborated and whose validity is rationally, i.e. universally, accepted. However, they also seek to bind self-legislation to a social process of scrutiny and validation that makes possible that the normative frame can promote individual freedom by means of the force of social approbation. Changing self-legislation into a social matter is the main target of Hegelian philosophy that links it to the wider topic of the self-conscious life.

Kant himself recognizes that the categorical imperative relies essentially on an altruistic and intersubjective sensibility of the subject towards the others and that this common objective law "can be called a kingdom of ends" (Kant

GMM, 41).² Hence, he already tackles the question about the community of persons that both give themselves universal laws and accept to be subjected to these laws, a community that is *per definition free* since nobody is under the control of any other. In the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* he sketches the question of a free community in which everyone is a free agent because everyone gives oneself laws and principles that are universally valid and that emancipate from external and arbitrary conditionings. However, Kant's vision of this community is independent from the analysis of the contextual and effective conditions of its existence like, for instance, its history, society, institutions, practices, rights and legal aspects. This is the result of the fact that he links self-determination to the compliance to the universal categorical imperative, what does not account for the historical, concrete and contingent nature of human institutions. The reason why history takes a prominent role in post-Kantian philosophy is properly because the only way to understand how freedom works is giving an account of the unique historical and intersubjective process by which a community obtains emancipation by constituting that "kingdom of ends" (Kant *GMM*, 41) already suggested by Kant, who has not been able to provide a thorough elucidation though.

3

Kant conceives of the "kingdom of ends" as "a systematic union of various rational beings through common laws" (Kant *GMM*, 41), namely a social organization of rational individuals that obey to the same universal principles or norms. He furthermore states that a law can establish ends by virtue of its universal validity, in other words it indicates the right course of human events by disciplining the conduct of every agent. Kant wishes for the education of individual persons through the principles of his own moral philosophy in order that they become able to appreciate the importance of being authors of one's own moral norms and of being no subject of others' orders and mastery. His

2 Kant *GMM*, 41: "For, all rational beings stand under the *law* that each of them is to treat himself and all others *never merely as means* but always *at the same time as ends in themselves*. But from this there arises a systematic union of rational beings through common objective laws, that is, a kingdom, which can be called a kingdom of ends (admittedly only an ideal) because what these laws have as their purpose is just the relation of these beings to one another as ends and means. A rational being belongs as a *member* to the kingdom of ends when he gives universal laws in it but is also himself subject to these laws. He belongs to it as a *sovereign* when, as a lawgiving, he is not subject to the will of any other."

practical philosophy is indeed linked to the wider discourse about humans' education and refinement through the ideals of the Enlightenment that promise a better humanity by the universal and natural faculty of the reason, which should emancipate human beings from their condition of minority (Kant 1784). Kant like each enlightener foresees the possibility to edify a better society and politics by enhancing our rational faculty and our capacity of self-determination by unchaining men and women from mastery and enslavement. However, unlike the French enlighteners Kant stresses the idea of emancipation by becoming one's own master and ruler and considers self-mastery as the outcome of a stoic disposition before external adversities. Reason becomes, hence, the main instrument for achieving self-determination because it is the only element making us free and independent from external conditionings by finding out an a-priori principle from simple rational deduction. As we already mentioned, the agent becomes free when she chooses to obey to a principle that she finds out from her own reason that represents her primary source of freedom and self-determination.

However, this conceptualization is evidently based on a radical abstraction due to the reference to both the notion of rational subject and the universal law. The notion of rational subject, namely of an individual endowed with the natural faculty of rational elaboration of problems, is intrinsically problematic because it is not linked to any specific and concrete life-form from which the practical element of her acting can be understood. I think that after Wittgenstein's and Anscombe's reflections about intentionality and action it results quite complicated to trace back human practical dimension to the mere notion of rationality. Those philosophers point out that personal intentionality should be tackled by making recourse to the notion of agreement in the form of life, namely by placing the agent within a context of codified practices representing both the identity and limits of her practical and intentional domain.³ This makes any investigation about the universal and abstract notion of reason as a natural faculty an issue that does not furnish a thorough explanation about human agency and the constitution of its intentional and practical surrounding. In fact, reason as a faculty that any being could bear, even an extra-terrestrial, may possibly clear up the capacity of judging but surely not the constitution of practical competencies by social embedding, and consequently not the relation of cognitive and linguistic interdependence between a social group and its members. Both Wittgenstein and Anscombe deal with the

3 Wittgenstein 1958, § 241: "So you are saying that human agreement decides what is true and what is false?—It is what human beings say that is true and false; and they agree in the language they use. That is not agreement in opinions but in form of life."

question of this interdependence that is a fundamental requisite for understanding individual actions and intentionality, and that makes us able to clarify the importance of belonging to a community in order to be recognized as a practical agent. Since there is direct interdependence between belonging to a community and the development of individual practical competencies such as following a rule and acquiring a language, the notion itself of reason seems obsolete because it does not shed light on this constitutive relation. Of course, Kant's reflection about the capacity of rational beings of having the disposition to find out universal norms of conduct by means of moral judgment remains a milestone in history of philosophy, particularly because of its contribution to the question of self-mastery as self-legislation. However, Kant's transcendental approach has the limit to merely pinpoint the a-priori condition necessary for having a moral judgment and does not deal with the explanation of the agent as integrated in a socio-historical context.

Unlike Kant's thought, Hegel's one gives an account of the interdependence of personal agency and social practices since he maintains that freedom and self-determination can only be reached by means of institutional cooperation, i.e. that kind of cooperation established through a legal, normative and institutionalized frame. His conception of freedom is so concrete that he does not seek a transcendental way centered on the conditions for finding out an universal law, he prefers instead to pinpoint the historical dynamic by which the participants themselves decide about the laws they have to obey in order to be free. After all, Kant was not able to straightforwardly clarify his own notion of "kingdom of ends" that should be founded by rational beings properly because the shift from the transcendental deduction of the categorical imperative to the concrete world is implausible. Hegel's strategy is quite different because he prefers to connect the normative to the fact that there is an interdependence among the participants of a practice, which is necessary in order to define the normative frame of the practice itself as an historical and actual reality. As we cannot have a master without a servant, or labor without consumption, likewise we cannot have any human person with an active role and duties without other persons acknowledging such role and duties. The normative frame should be constituted through this interdependence because it just represents its discipline and regularity. There is, evidently, no need to make recourse to any universal, transcendental and unitarian principle of conduct since practices, their rules and the conditions themselves of freedom can be conceived as established by their participants through their concrete interpersonal relationships.

However, in order to understand how the normative frame of a practice can be decided by the practice itself, namely on the field, Hegel has to solve the

question of establishing an *authoritative reason* through which Kant was able to ground his categorical imperative.⁴ Whereas Kantian authoritative reason relies on the simple notion of reason as main instrument of universal legislation of an a-priori principle deduced by means of a transcendental method, Hegel tries to base it on the practices themselves in order to get rid of the abstract consequences of transcendentalism and to link it to the concreteness and actuality of the historical context. A key word for understanding this operation is *Wirklichkeit* that in German does not merely mean reality, but that can be better translated as *effectual reality*, namely a reality having some effect on the context in which the individual subjects operate. Hegel is interested in understanding how this effectual reality works in establishing conditions for acting and for social jointness in an immanent and concrete way. Following him, social interaction represents a domain in which the normative frame is created not just by making recourse to the rational faculty, but rather by establishing some authoritative principle that characterizes self-conscious life within the practical domain itself. In this way, we can conceive of the agents as able to shape their practices and norms by making explicit principles that are inherently and naturalistically constitutive in their subjectivity.

This is properly the strategy that Hegel adopts in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* where he deals with the notion of self-consciousness and its constitution. It is well known that this notion was already introduced by Kant in the form of *transcendental apperception* or “I think”, whilst Hegel’s strategy is to link it to the concrete dimension of both its naturalistic requisites and its concrete and historical development without making recourse to any critical methodology of analysis about the conditions for its legitimacy. The result is that self-consciousness’ legitimation is due to its own natural requisite of independence from external conditionings that makes way to its own normative definition. In fact, the unity of self-consciousness represents the unity of the perceived world and generally speaking the unity of self-conscious experience, and this preserves its own identity from the plurality of sensuous reality. The capacity to maintain the identity throughout the experience makes possible that the subject is not a simple and motionless tautology ($I = I$), but rather it is a subject shaped by the practical and living context in which it is embedded.⁵

4 For the notion of authoritative reason in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* see Pinkard 1994. This notion is also connected to Bob Brandom discourse about the “force of the better reason” by committive practices that he explains in *Articulating Reasons* and *Making it Explicit*.

5 Hegel *PoS*, 105: “As self-consciousness, it is movement. But since what it distinguishes from itself is *only itself* as itself, the difference, as an otherness, is immediately *superseded* for it; the difference is *not*, and it [self-consciousness] is only the motionless tautology of: ‘I am I’; but since for it the difference does not have the form of *being*, it is *not* self-consciousness.

What we can call the normativity of self-conscious life is shaped by its own characteristics that Hegel links to the natural requisite of desiring (Hegel *PoS*, 105: “Self-consciousness is *Desire* in general”) and by its social interaction that aims at historically defining an authoritative reason.

According to Hegel, this authoritative reason is historically evolved through the social relations inherently connected to the notion of self-consciousness, which, as we previously saw (see Chapter 2), requires recognition and the normative legitimization of its own desiring disposition. Interpreters investigated widely the reason why Hegel introduces the social function of recognition in a discourse that is centered on the question of desire and independence from external conditionings. In fact, logically speaking, independence from *otherness* does not seem to match with the notion of recognition by *another* subject, because it links individual freedom to the autonomous act of another independent person. However, this objection disregards the important fact that independence is for Hegel the outcome of a *struggle*, namely of the effort of attaining social approbation and praise. In other words, social recognition comes as the final moment of this struggle that requires obviously a counterpart, i.e. another similar individual, for being carried on. Therefore, the correct question is rather why and how does recognition foster a more *enhanced* version of independence than the mere satisfaction of desires? The answer, I believe, is properly enshrined in the notion of norms as the social instrument necessary for shaping self-conscious life. In fact, one cannot have a valuable self-conscious life just with satisfaction of desires because it cannot be scrutinized by any authoritative reason. Desire remains in the private and solipsistic dimension of individual eagerness and satisfaction and it cannot be codified by norms unless it is subjected to any sort of social authority. The transition from the natural sphere of desire to the social one of recognition does not require the presence of any form of natural and universal reason, it is rather the result of the naturalistic development of the subjective relation to *otherness* because, as we have already mentioned, self-conscious life is defined as “return from otherness” (Hegel *PoS*, 105). In other words, the relation with some form of alterity is necessary for the constitution of self-consciousness, whose identity is not tautological like the Cartesian *Cogito Ergo Sum*, it is rather an identity built by means of the interaction with *another*. The authoritative reason that is in charge for setting up the normative has to be social, following Hegel, because it

Hence otherness is for it in the form of *a being*, or as a *distinct moment*; but there is also for consciousness the unity of itself with this difference as a *second distinct moment*.”

can only be effective when it is defined through this kind of relation to another, namely within the practical and historical dimension of social relations.

My thesis is that self-conscious life needs recognition in order to achieve the higher form of independence created by social acknowledgement and justification, what fosters the condition for an authoritative reason that can be socially scrutinized. As Brandom (1994 and 2000) rightly claims, the logical space of reasons is the domain in which norms and rules are jointly decided and evaluated by means of comitative practices based on the inferential articulation of ideas constituting the normative frame of our activities, certainties and knowledge. The game of giving and asking for reasons is based on the acknowledgment of commitment and entitlement to its participants, and the inferential articulation of reasons is social (Brandom 1994). Therefore, the practical domain is intrinsically founded on the principle of *authoritative reason*, namely a social authority that is elaborated and discussed by its members and decided on an inferential basis. This is what Brandom (1988) calls the *force of the better reason*, a sort of power owned by a statement and based on the *relation* the community of the speakers establishes with it. This does not only mean that the force of any statement is decided socially, it also means that a statement is defined as true after the participants have elaborated it inferentially, i.e. on an authoritative basis. Brandom's philosophy sheds light on the fundamental relation between semantics and pragmatics, social practices and truth, and unveils that the authoritative reason can be ruled by the members themselves of a practice. Moreover, he claims that the Hegelian philosophy comes to envision a similar coordinated pattern of concepts, reasons, practices and authority, and that the connection of nature, normativity and practices in this book discloses an authoritative social structure in which every participant is expected to demonstrate her own mastery over a certain activity or practical field (Brandom 2002).

The struggle for recognition can be certainly interpreted as a competition for demonstrating one own's authority and mastery over the independence from external conditionings, and this is the premise for having some sort of authoritative reason.⁶ The social dimension of self-conscious life, in fact, leads the

6 Brandom 2002, 229: "Reciprocal recognition, I have claimed, is for Hegel the structure that makes the normative intelligible as such. In its paradigmatic *social* form, it institutes both individual self-conscious *selves* (the subjects of commitments and responsibilities) and their communities (the selves bound together by attributing and assessing commitments to one another, holding one another responsible). In its *inferential* form, this structure characterizes the relationship between particulars and universals in the process of making *judgments* that is experience: the application of determinate concepts. It is exhibited as well in the relations of reciprocal authority by which applications of some determinate concepts condition the

notion [*der Begriff*] into the concrete existence of the historical relations of the individuals because self-conscious life itself aims at grasping social relations through a conceptual definition.⁷ As we often mentioned, self-consciousness understands otherness by means of the conceptual [*das Begriffliche*], which is conceived by Hegel as a naturalistic disposition of self-conscious life (see chapters 1 and 2 of this book). Of course, once the social dimension is established by virtue of the need of recognition, it has also to be grasped conceptually, namely as the explicit definition of implicit forms of practice (Stekeler-Weithofer 2014, 34–40). In other words, the social and historical domain has its own conceptual structure that is freely evolved by means of the contribution of its participants, and such structure is not random but rather determined by the principle of *social authority* or *authoritative reason*. Since the recognitive structure is normative because it establishes norms by means of reciprocal authority exercised by the participants, what Hegel calls *Geist*, namely “the ‘I’ that is ‘We’ and ‘We’ that is ‘I’” (Hegel *PoS*, 110), is constituted by the reciprocal influence and mastery exerted by every participant over others and over the practice itself, what also features the normative frame by which the practice can be understood. The emancipation of the bondsman from the master, for instance, is normatively ruled by the issues linked to goods’ production and consumption that decide the social authority of the worker over the master because he possesses the competencies or skill [*Geschicklichkeit*] necessary for the production (Hegel *PoS*, 119). The constitution of social authority in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* is conceived, hence, as strictly connected to the reciprocal influence and interaction of the agents that determine the normative frame in a *dialectical* way, i.e. by means of the struggle for their own recognition. Following Hegel, the dialectic is not only the characteristic

applicability of other, inferentially related concepts, thereby constituting the ‘community’ of all determinate concepts, structured by relations of mediation and determinate negation, that is, the Concept. In addition to these two forms of reciprocal recognition, we should recognize a third: the *historical*. It arises because negotiating and adjudicating the claims of reciprocally conditioning authorities, administering conceptual norms by applying them in actual cases (to particulars that immediately present themselves), is a *process*. In that process of experience, conceptual norms *develop*, along with the body of claims or judgments expressing the commitments that arise from applying those concepts. This developmental process of progressively determining the content of concepts by applying them in concert with their fellows is to be understood as the way determinately contentful conceptual norms are *instituted*.”

- 7 Hegel *SL*, 514: “The concept, when it has progressed to a concrete existence which is itself free, is none other than the ‘I’ or pure self-consciousness. True, I *have* concepts, that is, determinate concepts; but the ‘I’ is the pure concept itself, the concept that has come into *determinate existence*.”

of the ideas, it can be also applied to the understanding of the social relations because, as also Brandom (2002, 229–230) rightly states, self-consciousness is characterized by the understanding of oneself within social relationships. There is, hence, an intrinsic conceptual and speculative component of social relations and institutions, which is the outcome of the dialectical reciprocity among participants who shape the normative frames of their practices by recognizing others' authority over them. As a result of this outlook Hegel can state that freedom is in play in the struggle for recognition and determines the normative frame just by affirming the authority of one agent over the other(s).⁸

The chapter on self-consciousness is indeed based on the pursue towards a mere *subjective* authoritative reason because self-consciousness is declined through the first singular person and, as Pinkard (1994) claims, the switch to *Reason* should be explained as the pursue towards an objective and universal point of view that would solve the contradictions proper of subjective struggles, which are affected by particularism.⁹ In fact, with *Reason* we achieve the possibility to construct an explanatory account about the world (*Observing*

8 This historicized explanation of human freedom does not necessarily rule out the importance to talk about the absoluteness of freedom and of the person, what is fundamental for making freedom and rights object of pure philosophical reflection that does not account from single moments in history. Hegel's strategy is to conceive of absolute spirit as the supreme moment of speculation—and, I believe, of self-conscious life—namely the moment in which freedom, human rights and self-determination are understood in an absolute and non-mediated way. In fact, absolute spirit is the self-realization of absolute freedom by grasping its own concept, a metaphysical condition necessary for explaining the rationality of the singular moments of the finite spirit.

9 Pinkard 1994, 79–80: "In 'Self-consciousness', the issue of what we take to be an authoritative reason is at first explicated by the subjective point of view, and its insufficiencies then generate the objective point of view. After the two distinct points of view have been generated, they are then understood as being in opposition to each other in the sections that deal with stoicism, skepticism, and the 'unhappy consciousness'. The 'unhappy consciousness', however, ends with the possibility of a unity of the objective and the subjective point of view in which the reason that we take to be authoritative reasons are seen as subjectively determined by us but nonetheless as valid principles governing the world both in theory and in practice when seen from detached, objective point of view. That is, it creates the *possibility* for the individual thinker of having it affirmed for him that the world as viewed from the standpoint of principles that it endorses from his own *individual* point of view is the same as the world as seen in terms of principles that we would adopt from a more detached standpoint, with no conception of a metaphysical 'beyond' being needed to affirm for him these principles that he *takes as valid really are* valid. This unity of the two points of view is called 'reason' by Hegel, for it signifies that the capacity to affirm that 'this is the way the world is' is based not on our 'matching up' our representations with the world 'in itself' ... but on our capacity to construct explanatory accounts about ourselves and the world that are then tested internally to see if they can make good on their claims within the terms that they set for themselves."

Reason) and about our practices (*Practical Reason*) and to develop an objective social authority about ourselves. The chapter on *Spirit* will instead tackle the more historical and political aspects connected to this objective social authority.

4

The evolution of *Geist* narrated in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* can be read in terms of the relation between freedom and norms because it deals with the evolution of individual freedom by norms, namely by rules and principles established within social and historical practices. As Pinkard (1994) rightly maintains, the entire book aims at explaining the establishment of an objective and authoritative reason that eschews the conflicts produced by the subjective disposition of self-conscious life to achieve freedom and independence. The phenomenology of the *Geist* described in the book aims, in fact, to account for the historical evolution of a collective consciousness through the conflicts and disputes proper of human history. The book tackles several and different aspects of this evolution that encompasses historical events, cognitive and practical elements of self-consciousness, political, legal and even esthetic moments of self-conscious life, etc. This because the notion of *Geist* points out the successfully reproduced forms of life that we understand as self-aware, which are expression of collectively accepted norms.¹⁰ Following Hegel, the development of the spirit is necessary and rational because it can be grasped conceptually, and what we grasp, as Pirmin Stekeler-Weithofer maintains (2005 and 2014), are forms of practical life, namely universal modes of practices representing the necessary steps towards the absolute and speculative comprehension of what self-conscious life means. Norms are, hence, the principles ruling this becoming and determining the free development of interpersonal relations and socio-institutional activities.

10 Stekeler-Weithofer 2014, 38: "Die erfolgreich praktizierten und reproduzierten Vollzugsformen kooperativ verfassten Lebens sind die Seinsweise aller Normativität. Sie stehen in ewiger Spannung zwischen bloß verbalen und realen Anerkennungen. Dabei gibt es kein Handeln ohne ein Sprechhandeln ... Es gibt keine bewusste Vollzugsform ohne eine gewisse Reflexion in sprachlichen Darstellungsformen. Die Spirale hermeneutischer Reflektiertheit allen Handelns besagt dabei, dass alles Sprechhandeln oder Denken beliebig weiter kommentiert werden kann. Diese Kommentierbarkeit gehört zum Begriff des Handelns."

Can the individual subject be conceived as free within the evolution of this universal substance? As we saw in the previous chapter, according to Hegel, and differently from the empiricist tradition, freedom is not the absolute condition of absence of external obstacles, but it is rather the concrete and effective condition of being free within one's own society, in which some normative restraints are possible. The reason why concrete freedom is a social condition is multiple. Firstly, in contrast to Kant the authoritative reason necessary for attaining self-legislation cannot be transcendental, it must be immanent and effective, and the only way to attain an authoritative reason in an historical way is through sociality and sharedness. One, therefore, can only be free within social practices establishing the normative frame as expression of their own free evolution. Secondly, the only solution Hegel has for naturalistically explaining self-conscious life is to link it to sociality as necessary outcome from desire, namely as the result of the incorporation of the volitive faculty into the social scrutiny and recognition. Consequently, individual freedom is only possible within social activities in which the normative element of giving oneself the law can be fostered. Thus, only through the game of *giving and asking for reasons* rules and norms can be discussed, improved and accepted and only by virtue of this game we can evolve a collective and objective authoritative reason.

Hegel's effort to overcome the contradictions proper of subjective self-consciousness is properly aimed at reaching a condition in which this authoritative reason does not rely upon individual persons (the master, the worker, the skeptical, the priest, the Church, etc.), but rather on a social acknowledgment that, following him, is properly attained in the modern era. Reason is the moment in which this natural faculty owned by every human being is conceived as the impersonal tribunal for certainty, knowledge and morality to which everyone is subjected. Any normative principle scrutinized and elaborated by reason is, obviously, an universal principle and every individual person is expected to accept it. This represents an important instrument for the emancipation of humanity from both individual and ideological masteries like those based on superstition and religion. Hegel properly seeks a normative principle that makes humans free and he does not see any contradiction in the relation between normativity and freedom, because he maintains that the only foe of individual freedom is represented by being mastered by external and arbitrary powers. At the same time, norms as result of self-legislation are necessary instruments for preserving individual liberties since servitude and subjection originate in being controlled by external normative forces, namely forces that are imposed from external powers.

The consequences of the Hegelian conception about the normative are, hence, very important for understanding the constitution of the modern State as a legal and autonomous political body. His theory gives not only an account of self-determination as something achieved within one's own community by virtue of collectively accepted norms, it also tackles the question of laws as legal instrument for defending individual freedoms from external forces. He indissolubly merges their destiny with that of the normative and legal frame and he straightforwardly explains the possibility of having liberty *through laws*. His theory makes possible to think normativity as a necessary requisite for individual liberty, whereas English empiricists like Hobbes and Hume conceive of the latter as incompatible with any form of normative constrain and have, therefore, a pessimistic conception of sociality. For Hegel instead, individual personality is built and shaped by means of the social rules and conventions, because only those foster the extension of the sense of being free, which cannot be decided without practical forms of activities. In other words, we need forms of practices in order to determine the possibility of being free because there is no individual personality and, consequently, no individual freedom without them. While following Hobbes the constitution of a State implies a form of institutionalized restriction of personal freedoms, following Hegel the State is instead the only political body that can guarantee them as a collective achievement necessary for social cohesion and cooperation. He radically changes our understanding of the normative and of the institutions necessary for preserving them. Hobbesian traditional conception sees the State as the result of a mere social contract in which everyone transfers part of one's own autonomy to this political body in order to constitute one single entity that is able to limit individual liberty. This implies an absolutely negative vision of the political and legal institutions considered as much as necessary as arbitrary. According to Hegel, the State represents instead the complete legitimation of individual liberties and the mature expression of human cooperation. This is possible because he conceives of the practical forms of cooperation as collectively established and based on the philosophical assumption that they are expression of the free practical and social disposition of self-conscious life.

Naturalizing World Human History: Hegel's Philosophy of History

1

One of the most compelling aspects of the Hegelian thought is represented by the notion of human history, its constitution and development. The most theoretically relevant element of his theory about the history of human civilization is represented by the fact that he maintains that history is a substance and that it has to be addressed in ontological terms, namely as something having constitutive and foundational prerequisites. Therefore, philosophy of history is very akin to philosophy of spirit because both address the living, historical, social and institutional dimension of self-conscious life out of its ontological and natural conditions. Philosophy of history is also the logical extension of the Hegelian investigation around self-consciousness because the latter is historically determined and also because it evolves consistent and articulated chronological patterns. The reason why history is not just a chronology of events, but rather the necessary and phenomenological development of a substance is due to the fact that it represents the evolution of self-conscious life, which we can also define as human civilization. In other words, the evolution of institutions, laws, culture, languages, science, technology, human awareness, etc. unitarily conceived, is what we call history and relies on the same principles constituting self-consciousness, i.e. human spirit [*Geist*].

Many things have been suggested by commentators about the nature of the historical substance determining the evolution of human species, but less has been said about the logical aspects connecting it to the wider Hegelian investigation around self-consciousness and self-conscious life. The traditional interpretation accounts for the fact that for Hegel human history is governed by reason and its evolution can be understood in rational terms. Although Hegel explicitly maintains that there is a rational principle in play in human events,¹ the traditional interpretation lacks understanding about what he actually means here with the notion of reason and how it is linked with the very

¹ Hegel *PWH*, 81–82: “reason has governed and continues to govern the world, and thus also world history”.

constitutive principles of his thought, and particularly with the notion of self-conscious life. If we disregard this connection we could erroneously believe that history is subjected to logical principles and would not whatsoever contradict them, and that its future development will be always conformed to them. This explanation would be affected by the very modern concept of reason following which truth is the result of a solitary elaboration of facts, cognitive statuses and ideas and their conformity to reality. This kind of realism disregards the autonomous contribution of self-conscious persons and organizations to the development of their own history and naively conceives of history as a natural fact, namely a chronology with a simple and plain succession of before and after without any consistent interconnection. In contrast, Hegel's goal is to illustrate history as the unitarian development of self-conscious life, whose events are deeply interconnected because they depend on the same speculative and phenomenological requisites of subjectivity.

As a consequence of the modern approach, instead, we would understand the Hegelian idea of history as the attempt to understand a mere chronology of events as the rational development of a predetermined course of facts, which are rational to the extent that we are able to elaborate adequate notions and to explain the rational principles to which they are subjected. This would even alienate it from its natural course because it would imply that those rational principles are independent and sovereign and that no determination of human civilization is an autonomous act. In contrast, I will maintain that, according to Hegel, history is the result of striving for self-determination and self-mastery, and not of compliance with externally explicable and abstractly posited rational principles. In other words, the very principle that is in play in human history is represented by the autonomous definition of self-conscious life through time and through different institutional arrangements. It shall explain the course of collective events as the collective effort to exhaustively express the ideal form of life that self-consciousness attributes to itself. As we often highlighted in this book, freedom as self-determination is the central aspect of self-consciousness, history originates in the same eagerness to achieve a complete realization of one's own form of life. This is the motive why we should reconsider the Hegelian idea that history is governed by reason in a different light, i.e. that history is governed by the same logics of self-consciousness.

I maintain that Hegel intends to attribute his claim that history is governed by reason to the individual persons shaping it, namely its main protagonists like political leaders, nations and folks, rather than to those studying it from an external perspective, namely those who want to see a rational principle determining it. The evolution of human civilization is not accidental because it is subjected to heterogeneous principles that can merely be rationally

understood retrospectively, but rather because it is decided through those rational and self-conscious agents establishing its evolution and chronology. Therefore, the important achievement of the Hegelian conception of history is not the explanation of its underlying rational principles, but rather the attempt to connect it to his wider philosophy of agency, mind and self-conscious life. In other words, we understand history as a non-random evolution only if we understand the dynamics governing self-conscious life and common agency and how they originate from natural requisites.

As T. Pinkard correctly highlights, in Hegel's thought the objective comprehension of things "requires an equal comprehension of the subjectivity of the subjects making the judgments about objectivity" (Pinkard 2017, 141), because explaining facts requires the deployment of modal concepts like those of possibility, necessity, actuality, development, ends, etc. which are regulated and established by the rational subject itself.² Since the self-conscious subject is placed in a logical and normative space of reasons, namely a place of autonomous articulation of reasons and pursuits, its final end is infinite self-comprehension and self-reference. The reason why history is not explicable as a random stream of events shaping a fortuitous substance has, hence, to be investigated by explaining self-conscious life and its disposition to set up rules, norms and forms of practice regulating how those ends are achievable and guaranteed. Explaining human history as governed by reasons is therefore equivalent to explaining the fact that human species has the characteristic to define itself by means of an ideal of rationality and consistency, i.e. by means

2 Pinkard 2017, 141: "... there is the extended argument of the *Science of Logic* that a comprehension of the objectivity of things requires an equal comprehension of the subjectivity of the subjects making the judgments about objectivity. This is not the claim that the existence of things depends on the existence of minds, nor even that the existence of "mere" things is somehow "perfected" by the addition of minded creatures to the furniture of the universe. According to the *Logic*, very roughly, to make sense of things, we necessarily judge in two general ways—in terms of "Being" or "Essence," that is, by pointing out, classifying, generalizing, or counting; and by explaining things in terms of some underlying condition that is not immediately apparent in the mere observation of them and which ultimately requires various modal concepts (possibility, necessity, etc.) to make sense of itself. These two metaphysical structures of making sense of things require us to make sense of making sense, to look at the conditions in which we can say that sense has genuinely been made ... This thereby requires us to understand the role of the "concept" in making sense, and that way of speaking of the necessity of the "concept" works out into speaking of the necessity of self-consciousness in judgment. To put it more in the form of slogans: Without an account of self-conscious subjectivity, we cannot make sense of how we could make sense of objectivity (which is very different from claiming that without our conceptual activities, there could be no such things as rocks and sea salt). The *Logic* has to do with the intelligibility of our judgments about the world and the intelligibility of those judgments themselves."

of an act of inwardness that determines universal aspects of its own practical life form.

2

Surprisingly, many aspects of the Hegelian conception of history have to be found in the *Science of Logic* and particularly in the last chapter on the Idea where Hegel accounts for the concept as something that must be borne and sustained by a living and self-conscious subject. This subject differently from other living beings is determined by specific conditions of rationality and, more specifically, by the propensity to relate its particular features to more general and universal principles of agency and thinking. In his novel explanation of *Begriff* and *Idea* Hegel does not only underline the fact that the concept has to be embodied in a living being, he also stresses the significative affinity between animal life and self-conscious life because both require what he calls *self-related negative unity*, a logical function by which we are able to explain the structure of life as a self-generating and self-maintaining system of agency, namely an agency that is not externally programmed but rather determined by means of normative and internal principles of organic self-maintenance, called homeostasis. As I explained in the previous chapters, the homeostasis of the living is also illustrated by many biologists and philosophers of biology who point out the operational closure of biological organisms governing their functions by preserving their own internal design. Hegel, however, also underlines that this inwardness of life, the fact that the Idea is already present in life but in an unaware form, becomes aware in the rational species transforming its biological and behavioral life into a self-conscious practical life. Whereas other species occupy a biological niche by means of their own organic characteristics, the rational species is devoted to a different form of universality. For unaware living beings life is determined by belonging to a genus, namely to a general form of biological life deciding the good for each species. Biological forms of life can be even defined as practical since each species evolves specific skills or “know how” by occupying a biological niche, however this “know how” is not result of aware acculturation or social integration, but rather of mere unthinking natural evolution. In fact, we can state that, for example, a cactus “can” or “is able to live and reproduce in the desert” or that a polar bear “can” or “is able to survive on the ice” because we attribute a practical intelligence to their life and behavior, namely the natural capacity to solve problems. However, their “knowledge” or “know how” is genetically and not linguistically nor historically transmitted. In sexual reproduction individuals of the same

species share the experience represented by their own genetic design and contribute to the evolution of the species itself by passing on their own genes to future generations. In this way a natural connection and interdependence between the particularity of the individual existence and the universality of the genus is set up, and this contributes to the natural evolution of the species.

Self-aware rational beings do not share this destiny with the other living beings because their self-conscious life is characterized by an act of negativity before external conditioning and by conceiving of themselves as self-determining being. The human species widens the natural universality of their genus beyond nature into history and culture, which are effective part of human's evolution. Human history is, hence, the result of the naturalistic inclination of human beings to determine their own kind in terms of human final ends such as freedom, self-mastery and self-determination. This transition from genus [*Gattung*] to spirit [*Geist*] is the result of a peculiar evolution that we observe in the mankind and in its relation towards universality. The other living beings belong to their own universal form of life, namely to their genus, by means of mating that makes possible the transmission of individual features to other individuals of the same species. This determines the nature of the species as Darwin's theory about the evolution points out, because the universal form of the species arises and develops out of the contribution of those individual that are able to couple and to transmit their genetical structure to future ages. This explains the mutual dependence between genus or life-form and individual member by making recourse to the notion of genetical inheritance and natural selection. Both the single participant and the respective form of life are, hence, determined by the evolution of the breed, and simultaneously every individual member determines the history of its genus by transmitting its own genes to other individuals. Such mutual dependence is naturally determined and explainable by making recourse to the principles illustrated by Darwin's theory about the evolution of the species. However, something changes in the evolution of the mankind, since individual members are here involved in a social, linguistic, cultural and political enterprise having a chronology and evolving over generations. This is often referred to as the cultural evolution of the human species (Tomasello 1999). Consequently, what human individuals transmit is not only a genetic inheritance, but also a cultural one, and the history of this passing on represents the cultural history of the human species.

In this point there are some similarities with Tomasello's conception of human history and cultural evolution which is, however, based on the idea that language is the fundamental instrument for cultural transmission and

is evolved out of cooperative skills, what makes the human species unique.³ Hegel does not account for language because he considers it as a symbolization of cognitive stances and not as the main requisite for achieving cognitive capacities like it is considered in the ambit of the philosophy of language after the linguistic turn. He rather focuses on the constitution of subjectivity and self-consciousness from the particularity of individual natural condition for clarifying universal phenomena like society, politics, right, history, etc. These phenomena are intended as expression of a general will that is determined by the individual efforts of single subjects. In other words, he does not conceive of the human social and historical enterprise as a result of language acquisition, but rather as the outcome of the constitution of natural subjectivity through socialization. He maintains that individual subjectivity is originally shaped by means of social interaction and that the connection between social, rational and individual competencies is explained with the notion of spirit. In spite of this difference, his conception of human history is very sympathetic with Tomasello's one because both point out the strict relation between the natural notion of species and the cultural notions of spirit and history.

As we already saw, according to the *Science of Logic*, the notion of spirit is apprehended through the relation Hegel establishes between individuality and universality within the realm of life, the domain in which the Idea emerges as unthinking and unaware. In this domain individuality is represented by the living individual, which represents the concrete and material reality of life and consequently of the Idea, whereas universality is the genus, namely the universal concept of a form of life. Mating fosters the evolution of this universal concept through the contribution of singular members and fixes the relations among individuals of the same species since each individual bears the notion of the same form of life and exchanges with the others genetical information

3 Tomasello 2014, 138–139: “Modern humans faced some new social challenges due to increases in group sizes accompanied by competition among groups ... This created the problem of how individuals could coordinate with in-group strangers, with whom they had no personal common ground. The solution was the conventionalization of cultural practices: everyone conformed to what everyone else was doing, and expected others to conform as well ..., which created a kind of cultural common ground that could be assumed of all members of the group ... This group-minded structuring of modern humans’ activities and interactions, along with their conventional means of communication, meant that modern humans came to construct a kind of transpersonal, ‘objective’ perspective on the world. Conventional communication became fully propositional, not only because of its conventional, normative, ‘objective’ format and topic-focus structuring, but also because the speaker’s communicative motives and epistemic/modal attitudes could be independently controlled in conventional signs, which meant that the propositional content was conceptualized independent of the motives and attitudes of particular individuals.”

determining its evolution. In this sense, Hegel's understanding of genus is also very close to M. Thompson's conceptualization of form of life, which stands for the universal image by which we are able to define and differentiate a natural genus of life by attributing specific behaviours, pursuits, final ends and capacities to its individual members.⁴

What is very compelling in Hegel's approach is his attempt to characterize spirit, i.e. the cultural and historic substance defining the mankind, as emerging from life and as a notion implicit in human existence. Whereas other living genres evolve mere biological forms of life because the inwardness of their own notion, i.e. of their life-form, is only shared by mating, humans evolve a history and a spiritual life because they explicitly articulate and self-determine the concept of their own form of life by expressing universal forms of truth and knowledge.⁵ In other words, they define their life-form as an act of freedom and self-consciousness by deciding the final ends that should be pursued. Mere biological life is unaware and unthinking⁶ because it does not bear self-reflection and its universality is limited to sexual reproduction. Spiritual life is instead based on self-identity because it is the result of an act of self-reflection and aware knowledge of reality. Although both biological and spiritual life share the same structure of self-relating negative unity, spiritual life is aware of it and develops, therefore, the notion in terms of truth and knowledge by adapting it to reality. In this sense biological life is more rigid and idealistic because it persists in pursuing its own ends operating in the environment without objectively knowing it, while spiritual life elaborates a notion grasping the structure of reality.

4 M. Thompson 2008, 76–77: “We may say that a concept is a life-form-concept if it provides a possible subject for this form of judgment. A life-form or species (in the broad sense) is anything that is, or could be, immediately designated by a life-form-concept or a life-form-word. To this sort of ‘genus’ or *genos*, then, there corresponds that formally distinctive sort of generality. An organism or individual living thing, finally, is whatever falls under a species or ‘bears’ a life-form. It is whatever might justly be designated by a phrase of the form “this S” for some possible reading of the common noun S as a life-form-word. Or, equivalently, an organism is the object of any possible judgment, this S is F, to which some system of natural-historical judgments, the S is G, H, etc., might correspond.”

5 Hegel *SL*, 689: “Life is the immediate idea, or the idea as its still internally unrealized concept. In its judgment, the idea is cognition in general. The concept is for itself as concept inasmuch as it freely and concretely exists as abstract universality or genus. ... The elevation of the concept above life consists in this, that its reality is the concept-form liberated into universality.”

6 Hegel *SL*, 517: “Life, or organic nature, is the stage of nature where the concept comes on the scene, but as a blind concept that does not comprehend itself, that is, is not thought; only as self-aware and as thought does it belongs to spirit.”

This happens because animal life is conditioned by the internal notion of its own genus, whereas self-conscious life elaborates the internal notion by the aware attitude to establish a self-conscious relation to otherness. The notion of truth is the result of self-conscious disposition to understand the relation to outer reality through universal principles and not to be conditioned in this relation by the internal biological homeostasis as it occurs in animal life. This evolution is the result of the explication of mind in more aware and universal forms of autonomy, what requires to even sublate the conditioning determined by the internal and unaware notion of life in which the relation to otherness is limited by the natural and genetically transmitted notion. True knowledge sublates life because it makes the notion something which is not bounded to a biological design establishing a pre-fixed behavior. The notion becomes adequate notion or truth, namely the universal disposition towards otherness in terms of knowledge of reality and of the categories of the logic itself. In other words, with knowledge the science of logic becomes the object itself of investigation and the categories by which we understand reality turn into the structure itself of self-conscious life. In this way, we understand why self-consciousness is freedom, because it acknowledges and validates the structure of reality represented by the categories, by becoming independent from its own already given biological limitations.

3

The constitution of human spirit as a self-aware universal form of life based on truth and knowledge is a natural fact since it requires life, although it is even supervenient upon life because its patterns are the same we can observe in the latter. It is supervenient because the idea of knowledge requires experiencing the world beyond the particularity of the needs of a living being. Knowledge and truth represent, hence, a sort of emancipation from material needs as they foster the autonomous understanding of one's own form of life, self-mastery and freedom. For Hegel knowledge is fundamentally spiritual life, namely the capacity to know oneself because of the logical constitution of mind that does not foresee any otherness' independence.⁷ Since the activity of mind is only

⁷ Hegel *PM*, § 377 (*Zusatz*): " ... it belongs to the nature of mind to cognize its concept. Consequently, the summons to self-knowledge, issued to the Greeks by the Delphic Apollo, does not have the sense of a command externally addressed to the human mind by an alien power; on the contrary, the god who impels to self-knowledge is none other than the mind's own absolute law. All activity of the mind is, therefore, only an apprehension of itself, and the

the apprehension of itself, true knowledge is nothing else than self-knowledge, i.e. looking for the universal conditions of freedom and self-determination. Self-knowledge turns to be, hence, the spiritual and, above all, the historical condition by which the practical conditions of self-conscious life can be set up.

Hegel's theory on world history completes and more thoroughly explains what he believes self-consciousness is, namely what can only be realized in the historical and contingent dimension of practical life in which institutions, laws, rules and right are set up and improved. The link between philosophy of mind and history is based on the assumption that self-consciousness, the authentic cognitive disposition for Hegel, is defined by the practical and social dimension in which self-determination can be fully explicated. This is the reason why the *Philosophy of World Human History* should be conceived as the coherent extension of the philosophy of subjective spirit, which is properly philosophy of mind, and also an integrating part of the philosophy of objective spirit.

The approach that I am proposing for explaining Hegel's philosophy of history has the advantage to reduce the issues connected to the wide use by Hegel of metaphysical notions like Idea, *Geist*, concept, reason, etc. deployed for illustrating the course of human civilization as consistent to philosophical and rational principles. In fact, his approach towards human history might seem methodologically naive because one could be tried to believe that he arguments for the effective role of metaphysical forces in determining history. This problem led few interpreters to maintain that rationality can be applied to history if we look at it retrospectively, namely historical development appears rational to those investigating it afterwards. However, these interpreters also disregard the fact that history and human civilization are, for Hegel, ruled by self-consciousness and by the same practical principles governing self-conscious life.

Since self-consciousness is the movement [*Bewegung*] of self-distinction and understanding of the distinct object, this brings a practical dimension into being, in which the experienced object is the practice itself. The practice cannot be considered as independent because it is shaped by self-conscious subjects themselves and the distinction is only functional to the analysis. The re-appropriation of the object, the return from otherness as we previously mentioned, is proper of the self-determining nature of self-consciousness and is an act of reflection, a philosophical matter. History and human civilization

aim of all genuine science is just this, that mind shall recognize itself in everything in heaven and on earth. There is simply no out-and-out Other for the mind."

fundamentally represent the chronological and logical evolution of the practices and institutions shaped by self-conscious eagerness for independence and self-mastery, and only in this way one can disclose the meaning of the expression that historical evolution is rational. The rationality of history is enshrined in the capacity of self-conscious beings to establish what is good and what is bad for their own form of life and to consequently evolve adequate social and institutional practices. In spite of the main interpretation, the events of human civilization are not ruled but some external, metaphysical principle, but rather promoted by rationality and by a concept that is elaborated and inferentially articulated within self-conscious life. Of course, this process is not free of conflicts and confrontations, because the idea itself of good practice is decided in a dialectical way, namely by means of an exercise of asking and giving reasons, which is made on a large scale. What is decided in human history is the destiny of societies, ideas, ways of life, practices, institutions, values, and even taste and dress codes. According to Hegel, it is important that these expressions of human life are sustainable and justified in front of the passing of time. They are expected to have some rational and spiritual foundation in order to assure freedom and self-determination to the people involved in them.

I believe that there are good reasons to state that the only force acknowledged by Hegel is the force universally represented by what humans strive for, i.e. self-mastery. However, this force cannot be found outside self-consciousness because it is itself the result of a self-conscious explication of what means to be a self-conscious being. Therefore, when Hegel claims that there is a rational force in history, he properly refers to human eagerness to affirm the ideal of autonomy and self-determination within the practical sphere. The unfolding of history is the stream of the passing by of practices and values evolved for promoting such drive by a logical system that foresees self-conscious life as the apex of life.

4

As we already mentioned, unlike Tomasello and other evolutionists Hegel conceives of the constitution of self-consciousness as a fact that is not necessarily mediated by the codification of a language because he mostly puts the focus on the common requites of biological and spiritual life, namely on the inwardness of their own notion. Disregarding the role of language has the advantage to underline that both self-conscious life and the history of human civilization are the outcome of an act of freedom and self-determination. Hegel's theory on human history relies upon a naturalistic conception of

self-conscious life that explains both its dynamic and its rational character. Its rationality is, in fact, inscribed in the distinctiveness of the human species and in the constitution of human self-conscious life, which acknowledges rules, values, practices and institutions as outcome of an act of self-determination and negation of external conditioning. Human history represents, hence, the development of practices, institutions, values, cultures, etc. through which human beings determine their own life-form by contrasting external conditioning and by establishing a relationship to what is their own destiny as a species. Consequently, the rational factor in history is just freedom,⁸ as it results in placing historical evolution under an order of concepts and of considering history as the autonomous product of humanity. On the contrary, what makes history an estranged evolution is the tendency to consider it an indeterminate progress that thought cannot withstand. History has rather to do with *actuality*,⁹ the logical category in Hegel's thinking that explains the necessity of every contingent moment of reality and its relation to the whole, and for this reason it requires an act of reflection in order to understand the single historical fact as necessary moments of the entire evolution. Therefore, the comprehension of history requires the comprehension of those conditions under which we understand human beings and their civilizations as expressions of the same principles shaping self-conscious life. This is the reason why Hegel states that history both proceeds from and has the concept of spirit as its final end.¹⁰

The events of human history, like the occurrence of new civilizations, their decay, their institutions, their internal transformations, their clashing and interacting, etc. are, hence, expressions of human spirit, which is regulated by the principles of self-conscious life. Like self-consciousness, spirit strives to

8 Hegel *PWH*, 170: "...the relationship of spirit to what has being in and for itself, as a relationship to what is its own, is only one of freedom. Freedom in the proper sense is the rational. Free will, the particularity of interests, is only a mixture of freedom and necessity, and it belongs only to the presumptive or phenomenal freedom that stands under the influence of natural determinations."

9 Hegel *PWH*, 166: "Just as in nature there is a progression in the series of living forms such that the higher level is a universal life but at the same time appears as something determinate, so also must the universal in history assume a determinate shape and portray itself in a determinate way; for we are standing on the soil of existent beings, of natural shapes. In any event, history has to do with actuality."

10 Hegel *PWH*, 167: "This brings us to the content of the absolute purpose that spirit sets forth by means of world history and that is therefore the work of world history. This too, like the first two stages, must proceed from the concept of spirit. We have thus far indicated the mode of the beginning [of history], then secondly the moments of its progress. The latter must have a goal, a final end, and it is this final end that we now consider. It resides in the already-indicated concept of spirit."

self-determination by placing itself under an order of concepts governing its own way towards freedom. Human civilizations are social organizations developed for fostering self-determination by means of adequate practices, values, laws and institutions.

In this narrative, the adversary of this push towards independence and self-determination is clearly “otherness” represented by those external forces that require to be *tamed* in order to suspend their independence and to realize spiritual life as an act of freedom and negation. Such otherness consists prevalently in the transformation of those conditions under which we provide a definition for human civilization, and nations and people aim to manage them by developing norms and institutions that better fit with them. Obviously, institutions are subjected to evolution and transformations because of the dynamic character of human civilization and this introduces the argument of decay in history, which is a major argument in Hegel’s philosophy that he describes as following:

The new can only entail a surpassing of that people’s principle, a striving for something universal in such a way that this principle will determine itself further. This is possible; for spirit does not simply die a natural death; the spirit of a people is not a natural, singular, immediate individual but rather essentially a universal life and spirituality. And thus what appears as a natural death also appears as a self-mortification, not merely as the abstract negative of simple cessation; rather this negative other will come to light in the universality of the spirit of the people itself. The spirit of a people exists as a type (*Gattung*), as universal on its own account, and therein resides the possibility that the universal can appear within this people as what is posited over against it.

HEGEL *PWH*, 161

This passage highlights that while the universal character of a nation or civilization is realized when it attains its own identity, it becomes instead otherness when it is not recognized as such anymore due to a lack of self-reflection. The universal within a civilization is clearly its destiny to express a social life through institutions, norms, values, laws, etc. Hegel conceives of the decay of civilizations as a spiritual fact connected to the specific features of self-conscious life and its speculative way of interacting with the steady transformation of the historical substance. In human history mastering otherness requires satisfying the requisites of freedom and self-determination and, therefore, institutions are expected to be the result of an act of negation of external conditioning. A civilization realizes its own universal form of life by actualizing principles

and institutions that determine itself in an autonomous way, as negation of external conditioning and on the basis of speculative identity. The decline of a civilization is the result of the incapacity to govern external conditionings by developing principles implementing liberty and autonomy and by avoiding what Hegel calls its spiritual death (Hegel *PWH*, 161), namely the conservation of its material bequest without having a clue of the past immaterial values, practices and institutions. A civilization is based on speculative self-knowledge what makes it able to differentiate from the others by establishing objective values and practices that make it free and autonomous.¹¹ By virtue of this it becomes able to govern historical evolutions and to preserve self-mastery by developing principles of practical life.

Hegel's theory on history relies upon both his naturalistic conception of self-consciousness and his theory about speculation because it conceives of historical evolution as outcome of the natural disposition of mankind to pursue freedom and independence from external mastery.¹² Since spirit is the way

11 Hegel *PWH*, 161: "It is not merely the habitual routine of spirit's life that constitutes its transition; rather the spirit of a people as spirit must get to the point of knowing itself and thinking what it is. The spirit of a people is knowing, and this activity of thought in relation to the reality of such a spirit is such that the latter knows its work to be objective and universal, no longer merely subjective. This is the other principal determination that stands in juxtaposition to a natural death. In this regard we wish to return to the point that spirit produces its being-in-itself as work, makes itself into an ethical, political organization. This is something external, a system of articulations. Such a work is something objective, and for this reason it has universality as its determination and foundation. As the work of the spirit of a people, it is not something particular but something inherently universal. Only as enduring and permanent is it a work."

12 Pinkard 2017, 11: "The human shape of life is self-conscious. Describing it like this, of course, suggests that it is a life that is always reflectively aware of itself, but on Hegel's conception, such reflective self-awareness is to be distinguished from another form of self-awareness that consists in moving within a world of involvements in which there is an awareness of what one is doing in terms of various "ought's," "musts," and "ought not's" without there necessarily being any separate act of reflection accompanying one's awareness ... To be an apperceptive life—a subject—is to know that one is this shape of life exactly by being the life that falls under the concept, and an apperceptive life falls under that concept just by bringing itself under that concept. We are self-conscious animals by being the animals that bring ourselves under that concept of "self-conscious animal." Moreover, we are not disembodied somethings that, on looking more carefully at themselves, decide to bring themselves under a certain concept. We are the creatures we are by bringing ourselves under the concept. We fall under the concept by our actualizing the concept in our own lives. Hegel refers to this in various places as the concept's giving itself its own reality. The absolute identity of the two-in-one—of the I aware of me—is the apperceptive self. This conception of subjectivity's apperceptive self-relation comprises more or less the ground floor of Hegel's metaphysics of subjectivity."

in which our species conceive of itself as an unitary and collective subject, its history has to be understood in terms of the development of a plural Self placing itself under values such as justice, freedom, happiness, right, etc. and promoting adequate institutions and practices. Those pursuits do not aim at the satisfaction of organic needs that are determined by given biological conditions, but rather at the realization of a definite concept of self-conscious life. This is the reason why history can be conceived as a logical evolution of the idea that spirit has of itself and of human species.

Of course, human history is the evolution that selects civilizations and decides for the decay of some and the advancement of others, but it has not to be intended as a force that humans do not manage or cannot master at all. The force of historical evolution and of time is what selects cultures, social practices and institutions and determines their lasting over time. In other words, the contingency of social practices is not decided within the practices themselves as they are supposed to endure over generations. In this sense every human cooperative enterprise pretends to be definitive and to challenge the evolution and impermanence of the present time. However, history is a steadily becoming substance because material conditions and needs change but, nonetheless, the normative frame of these practices is always expected to assure lasting freedom and happiness to their members. Therefore, social practices are destined either to adaptation or decay, because the ways how freedom can be assured constantly change.

Although the ideal of freedom does not change, what changes are the practices by which freedom and self-mastery can be fostered. They change because historical conditions like resources, geography, weather, geopolitics, etc. change and with them also those social and institutional practices that are expected to promote human advancement and civilization. Therefore, the struggle in human history is represented by the effort to manage the contingency of activities and needs in order to challenge the impermanence the historical substance and to guarantee lasting institutions and freedom within this evolution. The reason why Hegel claims that “spirit does not simply die a natural death” (Hegel *PWH*, 161) because it is “essentially a universal life” (Hegel *PWH*, 161) resides in the fact that nations, States and civilizations are expected to foster those universal values and principles that make human life worth to be lived. When this happens such universal values are somehow contained into the institutional practices that we call civilization, when not they are what turns against the civilization itself by quickening its decay.

If we consider past cultures like the ancient Greek one, for instance, we can understand its own trend of rise and decadence in terms of rise and decadence of social and institutional practices. Of course, the democratic and inclusive

model of the Greek society is what fostered a strong sense of belongingness and defense from external influence and mastery. At the same time, those practices became outdated when in Europe rose political forces like Macedonia and Rome that were able to unify the entire continent regardless to local and minor organizations because of their capacity to export their institutional and legal model, what Greece was not able to do. Following the Hegelian formal setting of analysis the decadence of a society is an implosion that starts from within the organization itself, namely from its inability to abide by principles dictated by the temporal evolution of the historical matter. Thus, I do not totally agree with the interpretation that sees Hegelian philosophy of history as based on the exclusive analysis of the spiritual or ideal forces determining the course of the human events because Hegel really accounts for those material practices that realize the universal principles of good human life. In other words, I believe that, according to Hegel, the only spiritual forces determining human history are represented by the human capacity to fulfill self-conscious life expectation for freedom and self-mastery by means of adequate institutions and social practices like State, politics, laws, norms, values, an ethos, styles of life, etc. In fact, the spiritual element, namely the universal goodness of self-conscious life, can only be encouraged and promoted by real and effective practices and institutions that denote the concrete element of human progress. Classical materialists like Marx and Feuerbach would underline that the only engine for world history is represented by conflicts over material goods and resources pushing individuals and nations into struggles and confrontations. However, Hegel does not argue that spiritual forces are just above any material and practical needs, he just sustains that they characterize the final end that has to be pursued when humans set up social practices, norms, institutions, laws, etc. In other words, pursuing the universal goodnesses of self-conscious life like freedom, self-mastery, independence, etc. means fostering those practical and concrete institutions that make them achievable. In this sense, he has a very Platonic conception of politics because he thinks that main political and practical targets and tasks should be built after determining the supreme values of human life, evolve and defend institutions that make those values real. There is, hence, a strong practical commitment in Hegel's thought, rather than the attempt to reduce history to abstract spiritual forces.

I believe that many interpreters have been misled by Hegel's appeal to the notion of the Idea for understanding the course of human history and making it intelligible. This notion causes, in fact, a bizarre sense of abstraction from the real, observable evolution of history, which is instead prevalently conceived as a truly concrete fact. What also can look weird and unusual is Hegel's attempt to explain the sort of relationship and connection between nations,

historical characters, institutions and more generally speaking the course of human history to a Concept, an Idea and eventually a spiritual force named *Geist*. Is it plausible to think that there is a link between a historical character like Julius Cesar or Napoleon and a spiritual force actively shaping history? Is there some extra-temporal compulsion independent from the chronological sequence of events that exerts an influence on, or even determines human civilization? Would it not be more correct to assume that this sequence obeys to principles of mere consequentiality?

In order to answer this questions we should remember that Hegel's main issue about history's intelligibility is connected to his conception of history as a substance, and a substance has an ontological status that implies the presence of a *logos*, namely a law by which it can be finally illustrated. He probably does not intend to make history intelligible by just extrapolating an unique rational rationale. He rather intends to individuate what rules and decides the course of human civilization beyond the wills of the single actors and protagonists. History is not only rational retrospectively because it is a substance that temporally evolves by abiding by intelligible criterions. In this way, he can claim that the individual wills of important historic figures just represent a particular expression of a wider and universal will that is collectively endorsed. It is not just a question of making the past rational nor even to conciliate oneself to the inescapable development of facts and events. It is rather a question of understanding human civilization and its evolution as something that can be considered rational even looking forward. The notion of conciliation with the past has often been deployed to understand Hegel's philosophy of history. It is true that Hegel uses the word *Versöhnung* in order to indicate the process of reflection by which the contradictions of reality can be understood and brought to the unity of the concept. However, conciliation is a general principle of the Hegelian dialectic that does not completely grab what he means with the claim that the idea of spirit is in play in human history.

I believe that making recourse to the Idea here has the role to point out that the course of human history is not random but based on a development whose rationality is implicated in the principles of self-conscious life. The Idea is not the main force of history because of some sort of supernatural or metaphysical power, but rather because it represents the final cognitive content of self-consciousness. Self-consciousness is the truth of itself that is explicitly expressed by means of a concept, which is not, however, distinct from the practical and historical dimension in which self-conscious life is realized. Since self-consciousness is fundamentally eagerness to freedom and self-mastery, as Hegel several times states in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* and in the *Science of Logic*, the Idea itself of self-conscious life is not independent from the practical

dimension in which it can be achieved. Consequently, it is very important to understand the tight correlation Hegel advances between the theoretical and practical domains of self-consciousness. They are so strictly interrelated that they cannot be really distinguished since reflection, the theoretical aspect, is also a practical attitude, whilst practical agency is explained by making recourse to a conceptual analysis of the underlying implications linked to be an agent and to have intersubjective and social relations. The practical domain ought to be conceptually understood, whilst the theoretical domain has practical implications in the development of the concept of itself, which is the true development of self-consciousness. History is likewise a practical domain in which the concept of itself can be evolved for satisfying the original eagerness towards self-mastery. This final end in history is collectively pursued and temporally unfolded, therefore it is connected to a force that is much stronger than individual aims. This universal force subdues the particular will of singular historical figures that appear rather to be mere instruments of history itself that they do not create but rather endorse and foster.

As often happens in Hegel's philosophy, conciliation is a notion that requires to be adequately interpreted. It does not merely explain the process of accommodation of individual will in front of the inescapable unfolding of events, because this would jeopardize the principle of freedom. An accommodating consciousness that passively accepts the evolution of the surrounding reality, could not be free in the Hegelian sense of being "free in another". Conciliation is instead a reflective and speculative act of thinking by which the subject understands the necessity of the present moment and places it in the frame of historical evolution. Understanding the whole, in this case the course of human civilization, from the prospective of individual agency, sets down the latter in the condition of being part of it and to contribute to it. The notion of conciliation accounts, hence, for the integrative power of individual reflective thinking that evolves the role of subjective will within the collective process of civilization by being active part of it. Being active part of history and contributing to it requires to deal with the necessity of its process, namely with its rationale. Hegel conceives of the ineluctability of an event or of a development as something connected to its own universal necessity that can only be understood by a rational act of reflection, namely a rational and personal commitment to embedding within the collective progress.

We can, hence, explain the profile of a historical character as the personification of the conceptual understanding of world history, or even as the individual entailing history in the present moment. Cesar, Lorenzo de Medici, Napoleon, Churchill, etc. "were" themselves the identity of history because they were able to understand the necessity of their present time and to make

the right decisions. However, this capacity is not independent from having a concept of world human history, which is borne by means of a self-conscious and speculative exercise of reason. Therefore, conciliation is not simply individual accommodation to the ineluctability of the streaming of events, but rather a reflective attitude, which fosters personal liberties within the collective domain exactly like social freedom does in the philosophy of right (Honneth 2014). As we previously saw, the fundamental principle of speculative philosophy is that thinking reaches the subject-object identity and that otherness' independence can be sublated because the subject is able to understand the absolute as a system of relations of dependence in which self-consciousness has the very original role to strive for independence. Understanding this system of dependences and placing oneself within it but as an entity free from every dependence is the characteristic of self-conscious life and self-certainty. The logical effort of *Philosophy of World Human History* is properly to deal with this self-conscious effort in the domain of the historical events in order to understand whether the individual subject can be free also in this collective and temporal dimension. Hegel's strategy is to conceive of history as a substance that can be grasped by means of a cognitive act and as a practical whole in which the subject is embedded. The conclusion is that the subject in history is free to the extent that it is able to grasp the logic of its evolution, namely to have a concept of it.

Eventually, the *Philosophy of World Human History* is a theoretical exercise in which it is claimed that the course of human civilization cannot only be understood, but rather also governed. It is a typical and apparent paradox in Hegel's philosophy the idea that one can govern or be free only by means of thinking, what has been often considered as a naive conception of free agency. Hegel certainly intends to highlight the power of the conceptual [*das Begriffliche*] that he conceives as a cognitive power that can govern the course of history by understanding it. Explaining this power is probably the most arduous and obscure aspect of the entire Hegelian philosophy as it is expected to supply us with an unitarian conception of entire human civilization. In this chapter I maintained that Hegel is able to defend his thesis because of his naturalistic approach to human history that he considers as the social evolution of a natural species characterized by self-awareness. Since self-consciousness elaborates a concept of itself and strives for its realization, history is the scene in which the chronology of such realization is set and played. It is the living dimension in which self-consciousness's autonomy is at stake and the only effective force in play is the way how freedom is molded through historical institutions and their development. The concept of history is, hence, the inward and reflective element of human civilization disclosed by means of

philosophy that elaborates it and its explication. Thus, Hegel does not take into account any invisible power, he rather defends a concept of history linked to the logics of self-conscious life and its naturalistic aspects that we already and at length tackled in Chapters 1 and 2 of this book.

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